DUNSANY THE DRAMATIST

EDWARD HALE BIERSTADT

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DUNSANY THE DRAMATIST

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LORD DUNSANY IN HIS SERVICE UNIFORM

DUNSANY THE DRAMATIST

BY

EDWARD HALE BIERSTADT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

Fitz Memorial Library
Endicott Junior College
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TO

LOUISE

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED; FOR IT WAS HER HAND THAT
FIRST UNLOCKED FOR ME THE GOLDEN GATES OF
THE UNDREAMED CITY OF WONDER, AND IT
WAS SHE WHO FIRST LED ME THROUGH
THE WONDROUS STREETS TO THE
LORD OF THAT CITY — DUNSANY.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with pleasure that I acknowledge here my indebtedness to Stuart Walker for valuable material used in this book, and for photographs of those of the Dunsany plays which were produced in the Portmanteau Theater.

Miss Alice Lewisohn has also placed me under obligations by permitting me to use her picture of Lord Dunsany, as well as by aiding me with certain material. The Neighborhood Playhouse has provided me with pictures, as has Mitchell Kennerley, and to them too I am indebted.

It is through the courtesy of Sam Hume, Director of the Arts and Crafts Theater of Detroit, that I am able to use the picture showing "The Tents of the Arabs" in production. The set for this play was designed by Mr. Hume and is especially beautiful.

To Padraic Colum, and to J. M. Kerrigan, I am obliged for information about the Dunsany plays, and for material concerning Lord Dunsany himself — which I trust they will not regret having given! And to my friend Barrett H. Clark I express my gratitude for his never-failing patience, and kindly — though somewhat caustic — criticism!

This is a long list of acknowledgments for so small a book, and rightly the list should be even longer. I have no excuse to offer, but in explanation I suggest that a certain number of "accomplices before the fact" are sometimes highly to be desired.

E. H. B.

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DUNSANY THE DRAMATIST

DUNSANY THE DRAMATIST

I

The Man

For about the last quarter century, or from the time when Ibsen began to come into his own, the history of literature is at one with the history of the drama. The great literary artists of this period have nearly all chosen the dramatic medium, and, though they have not confined themselves to it exclusively by any means, the more notable of their works have found expression in this form. The nineteenth century was undeniably that of the novel; the twentieth seems to be quite as unmistakably that of the play.

In those countries where the drama assumed proportions of a national movement the development was for the most part gradual, its scope widening as its intensity increased. There are definite reasons why the dramatic art should

tend toward "national" expression in a greater degree than any other of the arts. The most fundamental reason may well be that the drama is part and parcel of the art of the theater, and that the theater is the great co-operative art. Co-operation, in theory at any rate, is our inheritance from the last century; there is hardly a phase of life where its influence has not become evident in a greater or less degree, but in the arts there seems to be but one logical outlet for the trend. That outlet is the theater, and the spirit of co-operation has perhaps been one of the greatest factors in instilling a new and increased vitality into the theatric and dramatic arts. It is strange, and yet not so strange, that one of the least co-operative countries on earth should have felt this influence so keenly. This country is Ireland, and it is perhaps because of the hyper-sensitiveness of the Irish people that they reacted so sharply to an element which was in reality foreign to them. And it is again perhaps because that element *was* alien that Ireland having reached a pinnacle of greatness permitted the movement to decline until now it seems to have little besides a past. The inherent inability of the Irish to co-operate

successfully over an extended period of time was, however, but one of the factors that brought about the change. The great war, and that rising among the intellectuals in Ireland that soon followed it, were fatally destructive elements, if only in the dreadful loss of life which they entailed. But Ireland has contributed her share, and more than her share, to the great dramatic movement that has swept the nations.

It was about 1899 that W. B. Yeats and Edward Martyn inaugurated the Irish Literary Theater in Dublin. At this time Lord Dunsany was in the Transvaal with his regiment, for the Boer war had just started. That is doubtless one reason why we do not hear of him until the Irish literary movement had been under way for some years; indeed it was in 1909, ten years afterwards, that "The Glittering Gate", Dunsany's first play, was produced at the Abbey Theater. There is no necessity to recapitulate here the history of the Irish Literary Theater or the Abbey Theater Company as it finally became. That history has already been written. Great names are connected with it — Yeats, Moore, Martyn, Hyde, "A. E.", Robinson, Ervine, Shaw, Colum, Lady Gregory, Synge,

and Dunsany have all had their share, as well as many others, in developing a national dramatic literature which has spread its influence over the entire English speaking race. The drama so generated and developed was a direct reaction against the drama fathered by Ibsen, and yet to a certain extent there is a superficial resemblance between the two. The form is the same certainly, and so also is the terminology. That is, we have people who are true to life speaking lines which are equally true. But the philosophy, the point of view which was brought to bear on the work was essentially dissimilar. This has been summed up well and succinctly by Edwin Björkman:

"Observation and imagination are the basic principles of all poetry. It is impossible to conceive a poetical work from which one of them is wholly absent. Observation without imagination makes for obviousness; imagination without observation turns into nonsense. What marks the world's greatest poetry is perhaps the presence in almost equal proportions of both of these principles. But as a rule we find one of them predominating, and from this one-sided emphasis the poetry of the

period derives its character as realistic or idealistic.

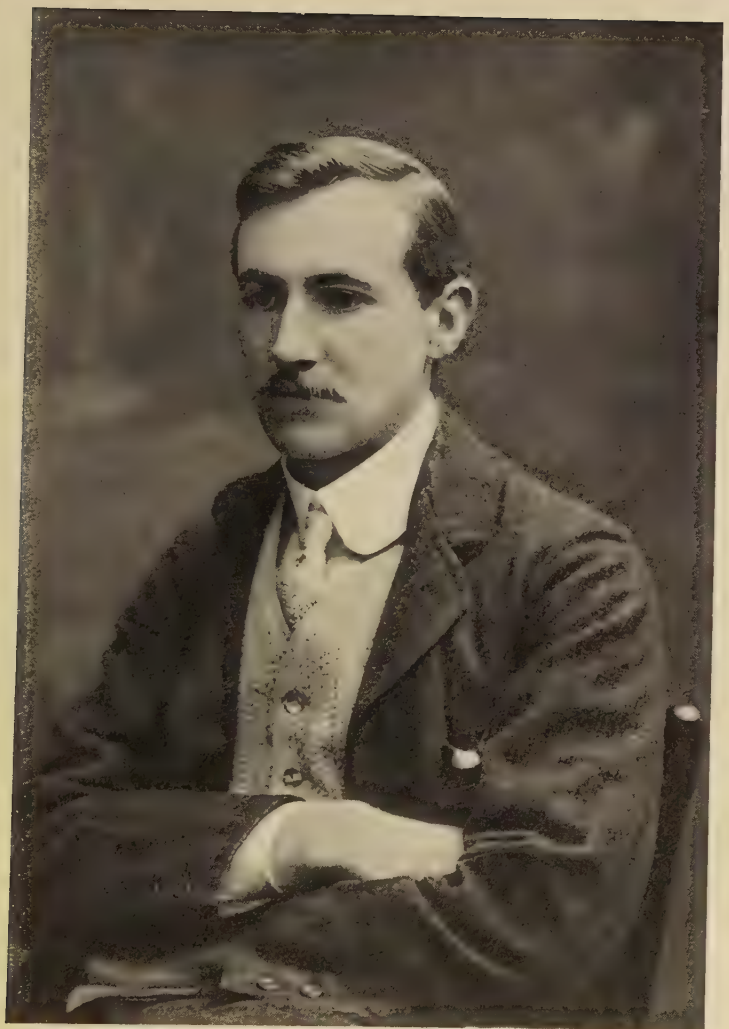
"The poetry of the middle of the nineteenth century made a fetish of observation. It came as near to excluding imagination as it could without ceasing entirely to be poetry. That such exaggeration should sooner or later result in a sharp reaction was natural." [1]

Once grant Mr. Björkman's premise (it is certainly a fair one), and it is clear that it is to the British Isles we must look for that new voice among the singers of the world, for since the Renaissance, Britain has always produced the greatest poets, just as France has given us the greatest painters, and Germany the finest musicians. Out of Ireland it came, and that land, waking out of its long winter's sleep, blossomed and flowered in overpowering abundance. The hand that waked the sleeper was that of Yeats. It was he who discovered Synge — the greatest genius of them all — and it was he who found Dunsany. It will be well perhaps to pause and tell a little something of Dunsany himself before we turn to his work. Vital

[1] "Five Plays," By Lord Dunsany. Introduction by Edwin Björkman.

statistics are not always interesting, but they are often necessary, and so let us try if we can come so close to the man as to understand and appreciate his plays and his point of view a little better.

Lord Dunsany's family name is Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, or it might be more correct to say that those are his Christian and his family names. He is the eighteenth Baron of his line, and his name and ancestry are said to be the third oldest in Irish history. In 1899 he succeeded to the title, and to the family estates in Meath. These estates comprise many acres of the most historic land in Ireland, and within sight of Dunsany Castle rises the great Hill of Tara, famous in song and story. Born in 1878, Lord Dunsany was educated at Eton and Sandhurst, and then entered the army. He saw active service with the Coldstream Guards during the South African war, and there is a faint memory of the hardships undergone at this period in "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior", when the slaves cry for the bones of the King's great dog to eat. There was a time in South Africa when there were not even bones. It is interesting too to observe that



Courtesy of Mitchell Kennerley

EDWARD JOHN MORETON DRAX PLUNKETT, LORD DUNSANY

Lord Dunsany's uncle is Sir Horace Plunkett, who labored so long and earnestly to introduce the idea of co-operation in agriculture among the peasants in Ireland. It was Sir Horace who took "A. E." from a clerk's office, upon Yeats' recommendation be it noted, to send him as ambassador among the rural classes in Ireland, and this was the beginning of "A. E.'s" career. Somehow one always comes back to Yeats. But now I must return to Dunsany. His family, by the way, are said to be of Danish origin, and to have settled in Ireland sometime before the Norman conquest. Perhaps that is one reason why his gods are not the gods of Ireland; one reason why there is a strain of northern mysticism, weird, indefinable, and implacable withal running through his work.

It must have been about 1902 or 1903 when we first find mention of Dunsany in connection with the literary movement in Ireland. George Moore remarks in speaking of A. E., "He was offered some hundreds of pounds by Lord Dunsany to found a review, but he had not time to edit it, and proposed John Eglinton. 'Contrairy John' wanted to see life steadily,

and to see it whole; and Yeats came along with a sneer, and said: 'I hear, Lord Dunsany, that you are going to supply groundsel for A. E.'s canaries.' The sneer brought the project to naught. . . ." And so the review was not founded. Nevertheless this must have been Dunsany's initial entrance as a patron of art. His first published book was issued in 1905, but his first play did not appear until 1909, when "The Glittering Gate" was put on at the Abbey Theater, Dublin. "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" followed in February of 1911 at the Abbey, and the next June "The Gods of the Mountain" went on at the Haymarket Theater, London. Then came "The Golden Doom" at the Haymarket in November of 1912, after which it was played successfully through a number of Russian cities. The productions of both "The Gods of the Mountain" and "The Golden Doom" were entirely successful, the first so much so that William A. Brady, the American producer, brought the production intact from the Haymarket, except as to cast, and put it on in Buffalo, New York. It failed promptly for reasons which will be taken up when we

come to consider the individual plays. This was in the summer of 1912. The next production was that of "The Lost Silk Hat" by B. Iden Payne at Manchester in August of 1913, during the repertory season there. In 1914 "The Glittering Gate" was put on at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, to be followed by "A Night at an Inn" and "The Queen's Enemies" in 1916, all at the same theater. These two last plays have not as yet had an English production. Thus the season of 1916 was a splendid one for Dunsany in America, for at the same time that "The Queen's Enemies" was put on at the Neighborhood Playhouse, "The Gods of the Mountain", "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior", and "The Golden Doom" were staged by Stuart Walker in his Portmanteau Theater, which may be said to be of New York, Tientsin, and Thalanna, for it is a traveling theater. The productions of the Dunsany plays were most beautifully done, however, and all New York was Dunsany mad on the instant. That is roughly the history of Dunsany's dramatic career. It covers only eight years, but surely those eight years have come to a most wonderful fruition.

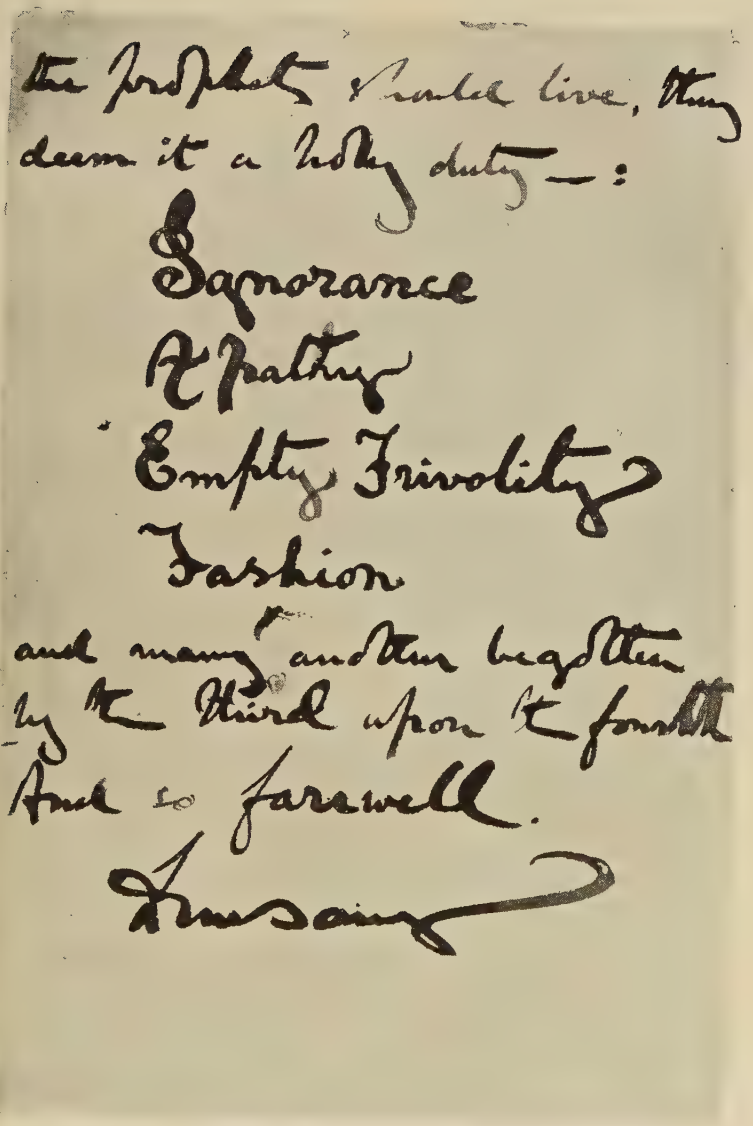
Lord Dunsany's style is at once the wonder and despair of his contemporaries; wonder at its sheer, limpid beauty, its melodic charm — sometimes his lines are perfect hexameters, defying comparison with anything since Homer — and despair at their inability to reach the same high level of excellence. This style seems to have been due in some part to a process of rather involuntary elimination. During his youth at Dunsany Castle he was never allowed to see or to read a newspaper lest he become contaminated by the filth circulated in the daily press. His books were watched over as carefully, and for many years no style seemed to him natural but that of the Bible. "I feared that I would never become a writer when I saw that other people did not use it," said he in speaking of this period. With the Bible he was permitted Grimm's and Hans Andersen's fairy tales, and soon afterwards he was able to recognize his like in the splendour of the literature of the Golden Age of Greece. This has remained, I believe, his strongest influence, affecting both his manner of expression and his point of view. The lovely imagery of the Greeks, and the pure melody of their lines, are reflected

in his style, and in his philosophy may be found man in his relationship to the gods or to the cosmos even as it was in the "olden, golden evenings" of Euripides.

To be the best pistol shot in Ireland is no small boast, but it is one that Lord Dunsany can make if he so wishes. He is a keen cricketer too, and has been captain of his County Club team. Often he is off for all day in the saddle, for he is a good horseman, and on these days his writing is done in the wee, small hours. Altogether Dunsany leads the life of the normal, healthy Anglo-Saxon, loving the out of doors, and rejoicing greatly in it all from the warmth of the sun to the glistening dew, and the cool splendour of the moonlight. There is not a morbid bone in his body and that is why, when I hear him compared rapturously with Strindberg, I am forced to smile. He is happy in his friends, and in his wife and little boy, and only desires to be allowed to remain so. Lady Dunsany is the daughter of Lord Jersey. She is intellectual, and she is attractive, perhaps charming would be a better word though it is somewhat overused, and for the purposes of the present sketch it will be enough to say that

she is an ideal wife for such a husband. Picture to yourself Lord Dunsany and his guest Bernard Shaw sailing paper boats in the pond at Dunsany Castle, and see whether you too cannot get the eternal spirit of childhood which makes such a scene not only possible but keenly pleasurable to the participants. Did you never sail paper boats, and would you not like to do it again?

As I said, much of Dunsany's work is done at night, and, it is an infinitely small point but an amusing one, it is all done with quill pens, a large supply of which he keeps before him. I remember when I first saw a letter from him I wondered whether he used a brush as the Japanese do. It seemed to me that nothing else would make such great lines. His work is not methodical; he does it when the fit is on him, and there is no reason why he should not, for he is not only independent of the public economically, but mentally and spiritually as well. Yet he is eager for praise, as who is not who has respect for his work. He is intensely desirous of being accepted by the public, of having others love his gods as he does. And yet appreciation has come to him slowly. His



A Page of a Letter from Lord Dunsany, Who Writes with a Quill

first book was published at his own expense, and even the illustrator was paid by him. I saw a first edition of this book the other day listed at fifteen times the original retail price. Publishers seemed to think that a "Lord" had not to think of money, yet Lord Dunsany is not rich as such things go nowadays. For a poet he is without doubt fabulously wealthy, but for a peer he is rather poor. One of his chief characteristics is his intense eagerness. This quality is apparent in his attitude toward everything; his work, his play, his desire for appreciation, and his whole outlook upon life as a whole and in particular. Eager is a very good word to use in that connection, for it conveys in some wise that naïveté of which it is an essential part.

It is said, even by his friends, that Lord Dunsany is the worst dressed man in Ireland. "He looks," remarked one of these friends, "as if he'd stood there naked, and had his clothes hurled at him, leaving them wherever they happened to land." I may be wrong, but I believe this statement is slightly exaggerated. However — ! In appearance Lord Dunsany is tall, quite six feet two, and rather slender, with

fair hair, and kindly eyes from which the wonder has not yet vanished, and with the most exquisitely sensitive mouth in the world. Was it not Thoreau, by the way, who said: "Who am I to complain who have not yet ceased to wonder?" Lord Dunsany is like that.

His attitude toward his title of Peer as well as his title of Poet is immensely characteristic of the man. Though he is the eighteenth Baron of his line his dignity has lost none of its freshness for him in tradition; rather it has gained. Strangers meeting him for the first time sometimes go away feeling that he is too haughty for them, but they do not understand. He *is* haughty, and he *is* proud when the occasion warrants it, but it is never the *hauteur* or the false pride of a snob. It is simply his absolute sense of the fitness of things. It is as if he said — what is the use of having a title or of being a poet if you don't get all the fun out of it that you can? The attitude of a small boy toward his first pair of long trousers, or of a girl toward her first lover is entirely similar. But perhaps the best comparison is to say that Lord Dunsany and Don Quixote are very nearly one and the same. To know that

he is a Baron with centuries of tradition behind him, to realize that his great estates are a historic landmark in Ireland, and then above all to be a Poet into the bargain — what more could the heart of small boy or Dunsany himself wish for? And how he must enjoy it all!

Lord Dunsany is an Imperialist of the Imperialists largely, I think, because it satisfies his sense of romance. Once on a time Lord Dunsany was candidate at the elections, and his joy passed the bounds of enthusiasm when he found that he was beaten. Politics do not interest him except as they serve to complete the picture. He sees himself as a romantic, a feudal figure, and because he does so see himself he is one. But his point of view on all this is that of the joyous child playing with glittering toys, and seeking new worlds to conquer over the sand hills. G. K. Chesterton, in "Manalive", drew Dunsany's picture for once and all.

At the beginning of the present war Lord Dunsany was Captain in the 5th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He went at the head of his company to Gallipoli, returning safely to Ireland only to be wounded in the Dublin riots. For a time, before returning to the front, he

was in barracks recovering from his wound. In Dunsany's company was Francis Ledwidge, the Irish poet whom Dunsany himself discovered. Ledwidge is of peasant stock, a poet of the soil, and the beauty of his lyrics might perchance have been lost to the world had it not been for Dunsany's kindly interest. It was Dunsany who wrote the Introduction to Ledwidge's first book of verse, and in this Introduction is a passage which in its summing up of Ledwidge sums up Dunsany himself so well that I shall quote it here. "Of pure poetry there are two kinds, that which mirrors the beauty of the world in which our bodies are, and that which builds the more mysterious kingdoms, where geography ends and fairyland begins, with gods and heroes at war, and the sirens singing still, and Alph going down to the darkness from Xanadu. Mr. Ledwidge gives us the first kind." And Lord Dunsany gives us the second.

It was for Yeats that Lord Dunsany's first play was written. Yeats wanted a play for the Abbey Theater and, though Dunsany had never written a play, Yeats asked him to try what he could do. "The Glittering Gate" was the result, one which never pleased its author,

LORD DUNSANY
Captain, 5th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

feeling as he did its vagueness and its faulty construction. The play is much less important in itself than in its indication of what might follow. It was Yeats, too, who at this time gave Dunsany the only lesson he ever had in dramatic construction; the pupil has advanced far beyond his master now. "Surprise," said Yeats, "is what is necessary. Surprise, and then more surprise, and that is all." However greatly Dunsany's plays have grown in other ways it can never be said at least that this early lesson was wasted, for to this day surprise is one of their chief elements of delight. But such a bit of advice from the gentle Yeats might have ruined the work of one who had less dramatic instinct than Dunsany. And does not what I have said about the man himself show the presence of such instinct quite apart from the plays?

The three great contemporary dramatic poets of Ireland are Synge, Dunsany, and Yeats. Now while comparisons are said to be odious they are at the same time often enlightening, and it may not be amiss to compare in a general way these three men who stand at the top of the great literary movement of the day.

Dunsany and Yeats are alike in that they both are more interested in ideas than in people. Therein lies at once their strength and their weakness. Of the three Synge was the only one who knew poverty and misfortune in plenitude; his whole life was such as to emphasize the human element, as the lives of Dunsany and Yeats have been to make this element of less account. They have lived in a dream world. A poet considers things and people in three ways — in their relation to themselves, in their relation to each other, and in their relation to the whole. The greatest poet is he who in his work is able to see and to express things in all three ways. Synge's weakness lay in the fact that as a rule he saw people in their relation to themselves and to each other, but not in their relationship to the whole scheme of things. It is only in one play, his greatest, "The Riders to the Sea", that he achieved and made plain this triple relationship, and that play alone marks a height to which no one of his fellows has yet been able to climb. "The Riders to the Sea" is one of the great masterpieces of modern drama. George Moore rated it below "The Well of the Saints" because it was less of the

soil, which is to say less local, but that which Moore pointed as its weakness is in reality its strength; that is what makes it akin to the Greek drama, its realization of man in his relation to the cosmos, of his impotency, and of the great cosmic implacability. "The Riders to the Sea" is, however, an isolated example of this quality in Synge's work. Yeats and Dunsany err on the other side: their outlook is almost entirely cosmic, man is removed from man, and is considered only in reference to the gods, the fairies, or whatever it is that represents the whole. A poet must have his head in the clouds, but his feet must be touching on Mother Earth. The feet of both Dunsany and Yeats are often striding through the skies where mortals cannot follow. This is much less true of Dunsany, who achieves a far better balance in his work than Yeats, but it is sufficiently true of them both to be defined as a limitation. Synge, with his both feet hard on the ground, thrust his head for a moment through the upper air and in that instant achieved immortality.

In style, which is to say beauty and clarity of expression, there cannot be much doubt but

that Dunsany stands alone. Since William Morris no such English has been written. It is in this regard that Yeats becomes obscure, and Synge occasionally colloquial. Moore in speaking of Yeats remarks that "he attempted a joke, but it got lost in the folds of his style." Unfortunately too many of his ideas have been lost in that same manner. His style is rich, but it is rarely clear; whereas with Synge, his style is clear, but it is not always rich. But with Dunsany, his style is both rich and clear beyond desire. There is nothing that he cannot say, and in the saying make more beautiful or more dramatic than can another. His greatest thoughts as well as his smallest are all expressed so simply, and yet so exquisitely that a child can understand and feel the sheer beauty. There is a music, and a magic harmony in his lines that no other living writer can imitate.

From a dramatic standpoint Synge and Dunsany are very fairly matched. Yeats is so much less a dramatist than a poet that it is difficult to consider him in this connection. Through the work of both Synge and Dunsany one finds errors of dramaturgy side by side with magnificent examples of perfect structure.

It is probable that "The Riders to the Sea", masterpiece though it is, would have been better in two acts than in one, and it is certain that "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" would have been a better play in three acts than in two. On the other hand, "The Shadow of the Glen" and "A Night at an Inn" are well-nigh perfect one act plays so far as construction is concerned. They might well stand by themselves as a criterion of excellence.

For some time past it would be fair to say that the point of view of the literary artist was entirely microcosmic, and that is one reason why we hail Dunsany with such a sense of relief, even of quiet and of gratitude. Yeats too has attempted to bring us closer to the great heart of things, but his fairies and heroes are of local origin, while Dunsany's gods are universal if they are anything. This was the immense advantage Dunsany achieved in creating his own mythology; he was not bound by place or time, and the only associations his characters have are those of the infinite. His expression is universal in the broadest sense, and upon the theory of universality is founded the philosophy of art. Man becomes tired of himself,

and fatigued with his fellows, and when this time comes his only peace is to be found in his relation to the infinite. A part becomes sated with itself or with another part, but upon the whole it may feed eternally. But I fear that in my own desire to clarify I have only confused, and that from the philosophy upon which art is founded I have wandered almost into metaphysics, so faint is the dividing line between them. It is only a critic who is so foolish as to try to explain the beautiful or to think that it can need explanation.

II

His Work

It will be well now to take each of Lord Dunsany's plays in turn and see what may be gained by a brief analysis of its structure and of its meaning, and in so doing let us take them chronologically, for to list them at once in the order of their importance would be to anticipate the work at hand.

THE GLITTERING GATE

The scene is a Lonely Place, and the time the Present.

The Lonely Place is strewn with large black rocks and uncorked beer-bottles, the latter in great profusion. At back is a wall of granite built of great slabs and in it the Gate of Heaven. The door is of gold.

Below the Lonely Place is an abyss hung with stars.

The two characters of the piece are Jim, lately a burglar, for he is dead, and Bill, likewise deceased, who was a pal of Jim's on earth.

Jim was hanged and Bill was shot, and the marks of their recent ordeal are still upon them. Jim has been dead the longer, so that he is there first. Bill finds him uncorking empty beer bottles endlessly and throwing them away, as he enters and knocks on the Gate of Heaven. Each time that Jim finds himself deceived by the empty bottles faint and unpleasant laughter is heard from somewhere in the great void. Bill recalls to Jim the little things of their life together and gradually Jim remembers. Finding the great door immovable before him Bill recollects that he has still with him his old jemmy, "nut-cracker", so with it he tries to drill open the huge Gate of Heaven. Jim takes little interest in the endeavor until suddenly the door begins to yield. Then they both give themselves up to imagining all the wonders that will confront them on the other side of the closed door. Bill is sure that his mother will be there, and Jim thinks of a yellow-haired girl whom he remembers as a bar-maid at Wimbledon. Of a sudden the drill goes through and the great door swings slowly open, and — there is nothing there but the great blue void, hung with twinkling stars.

BILL. (*staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing, in which far stars go wandering*) Stars. Blooming great stars. There *ain't* no heaven, Jim.

(*Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh has arisen off. It increases in volume and grows louder and louder.*)

JIM. That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd do that!

(*The curtain falls and the laughter still howls on.*)

This play has been pointed out as a bit of rare cynicism on the part of Lord Dunsany, but I am inclined to think that this opinion is unjustified. What he has done is simply that which he never tires of doing, of showing man in his eternal conflict with the gods. The Gate of Heaven cannot be forced open with a jemmy, or if it is there will be found nothing on the other side. Bill and Jim are both materialists, and having broken both the law of God and man all their lives, it is thoroughly in keeping that after death they should adhere to their old beliefs, that there is nothing too strong or too sacred to be forced to serve their turn. Not to try to force the door would be wholly out of character for them, but to force it and to find heaven on the other side would violate our sense of the eternal fitness of things. Sur-

rounded by empty beer-bottles, fitting symbols of their material life, and hounded by the mocking laugh of Nemesis, Bill and Jim can only vent their spleen in a last bitter outcry against the eternal. The old and endless balance of things is achieved, and the law is accomplished.

The play is open to several interpretations and therein lies its greatest weakness. The issue is not clearly defined and it is only in the light of Dunsany's other work that we are able to attempt a logical elucidation. A mythology such as Dunsany's presupposes a certain element of fatalism when man comes in contact with the cosmic force. It must be remembered too that Dunsany is a great *imaginative* genius, — have I not deplored his lack of interest in man as related to man? — and that imagination is a wholly mental quality. Any emotion we get from Dunsany is not one based on human attributes; for the most part it is purely æsthetic, a rapture at the beauty of his conceptions, and at his manner of expression, or a terror at the immensity and grandeur of what he shows us. Herein he is at one with the Greek dramatists, and this attitude on his part has been laid

Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse.

THE GLITTERING GATE

The gate opens — and there is nothing there

down by Aristotle as a law of tragedy centuries ago. That is why we find so little human sympathy shown in his treatment of Bill and Jim. How easy it would have been to have made this play a maudlin diatribe! But Dunsany's point of view on the problem is purely dispassionate, entirely that of an artist —and an aristocrat! And after all the little play must not be taken too seriously. It has a story to tell, and with Dunsany the story is paramount always. There is no need to attempt to read in a hidden meaning. Yeats might have written the play and if he had done so we should doubtless have had a second version of "The Hour Glass" or something closely akin to it. Indeed the influence of Yeats on this first play of Dunsany's is not to be ignored.

Dramatically "The Glittering Gate" leaves much to be desired. It most certainly furnishes an excellent example of the law of surprise, and it even provides suspense, a much more vital element, and one which is not always to be found in Dunsany's plays. How often it has been said that a dramatist must not keep anything from his audience! A genius may

do all things, and as a rule Dunsany prepares us for his surprise so effectively that in the very preparation an element of suspense is created. It is interesting to observe that Dunsany here avoids an error which marks a weak spot in two of his later and bigger plays; that is, he does not attempt to bring the gods on the stage. The mocking laughter is much more mysterious and terrible when its source in unknown.

The dialogue is excellent. The language that the two dead burglars use is perfectly natural and in character, albeit the situation is grotesque. This very incongruity is highly dramatic in itself. Through the dialogue, too, runs a vein of gentle irony, as there does through every Dunsany play. Each character is developed along individual lines. Jim is frankly a cynic; Bill is more trusting — but Jim has been dead the longer.

In dénouement the play is masterly. The climax is led up to without hesitation and when the moment comes the blow is struck with deadly accuracy. Then the play is over. No further time is wasted in "past regrets or future fears." It is not a very good play on the whole, but considering the circumstances under which

it was written it is beyond question an extraordinary play. I think it is a better play than "The Queen's Enemies", which was written much later and which was successful in production. But "The Glittering Gate" will remain always one of the least popular of Dunsany's plays, for while the dialogue, the humor, the characterization, the dénouement are all done well and with infinite finish, the purpose of the play is undoubtedly vague, and no matter how capable it is of elucidation its lack of clarity detracts from the force of the piece. It could not be otherwise. The play depends on the situation and upon the dialogue to hold the interest of the audience; there is no actual opposition to the characters, none of the immediate and personal conflict for which the modern audience has been taught to look. To some people this will always be a lack in Dunsany's plays, but they could not have been written in any other way and written as well. The impotency of man is much more strongly shown when he is placed in conflict with a gigantic indefinable force; as soon as that force suffers embodiment, it is brought down to man's level, and the whole conception is destroyed.

"The Glittering Gate" stages well, and acts well; it is very short even for a one-act play, but its lack of definitiveness keeps it from being classed with the later and more forceful work of the author. None of Dunsany's plays could be described as robust; they are too delicate, and too full of finesse for that, but "The Glittering Gate" is not even vital. And notwithstanding all that, it is a most extraordinary play.

KING ARGIMĒNĒS AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

The action opens in the slave fields of King Darniak, where King Argimenes, a deposed and captured monarch, is working with the slaves. King Argimenes has just finished the bone he was gnawing and laments that he has nothing more to hope for. Zarb, a slave, envies him his beautiful memories, for he himself can recall nothing better than the fact that he once went for a full year without beatings. He tells Argimenes too that the King's great dog is ill and that they may soon have more bones. Argimenes left alone goes on digging, until of a sudden he comes on a great bronze sword left there long ago by some unknown warrior.

Photo by J. M. Cummings. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

The slaves see Argimenes kill the guard

He offers a prayer to the spirit of the departed, and conspires with Zarb to rebel against King Darniak. Zarb tells him that now he has a sword, and such a sword, the slaves will believe he is a King and will follow him. Argimenes creeps off to where the slave-guard are seated with their backs to the diggers, intending to kill the guard and arm the slaves. As the curtain falls one sees the slaves all huddled together watching Argimenes stalk the slave-guard, and at the very last a great gasp of wonder goes up from them. This scene is very remarkable. From the time when Argimenes makes his intention apparent to Zarb, to the fall of the curtain the action off stage is as clearly shown as that before the audience. Argimenes creeping through the sand hills, and then showing himself on the horizon line as he plunges downward to the attack is as clear before us as the slaves themselves as they watch and listen in awe and agony.

The second act is in the throne-room of King Darniak. The King is seated in all his glory on his throne with his four lovely Queens beside him. On his right is his idol, Illuriel, with an idol-guard in front of him. The King's Over-

seer brings plans for a new garden, and they are discussed by the King and Queens. A hill must be removed, terraces made, and the slaves must be flogged that the work be accomplished more quickly. Power and selfishness are very clearly and amusingly depicted. Then a Prophet comes in to prophesy, and the Queens comment caustically on the cut of his hair while the King converses aside. The Prophet warns them of the approaching doom, of an enemy within the gates, but there is no one to give him heed. When he stops, the King in a bored tone, and without listening to him, bids him continue. The Prophet goes out and the King and the Queens go to the banqueting hall. The idol-guard ruminates on the prophecies and feels a sense of disquietude. A great noise of fighting is heard without. The slaves rush in all armed and overpower the idol-guard, throwing down Illuriel and breaking him in seven pieces. They go back to face the remnants of the palace guard, and Darniak rushes in from the feast to find his idol fallen and his throne broken. He goes back in an effort to flee, for he knows that his doom is upon him. The slaves reënter with Argimenes at their

head. Argimenes takes his place on the throne, and throws a cloth of gold about his shoulders. He looks the King he is and the slaves bow before him in awe and wonder. Suddenly the Keeper of the King's Great Dog comes to say that the royal beast is dead. In an instant Argimenes forgets that he is a King once more and with a cry of "Bones!" he rushes forward, followed by the slaves. Then, recollecting himself, he returns to the throne, and with dignity commands that the King's Great Dog be buried. "Majesty!" cries Zarb, confounded at this last token of royalty. And so the curtain falls.

It is unquestionable that the first act of this play is immeasurably superior to the second. The first has a unity, a directness, and a force which the second lacks, breaking as it does into several phases of action. From the time when King Darniak goes with his Queens into the banqueting hall to the entrance of Argimenes and the slaves there is a momentary interlude, and just here the act breaks, splitting into two sections. In the last half of the act the entrances and exits are not carefully arranged, and altogether the effect of the whole is to give

the act a downward slant rather than the upward one that it should have. The play "falls off" at the conclusion. This is all due simply and solely to faulty construction. This was the first play Dunsany attempted in more than one act, and hence it must be regarded somewhat as in the nature of an experiment. Probably the play would have been better written in three acts instead of in two. The first act in that case would show King Darniak on his throne with the Queens and the Prophet; in short it would contain the material now used in the first part of act two. The second act would be the present act one just as it now stands; and act three would be composed of what is now contained in the second portion of act two. Thus we would see the splendour of Darniak on his throne, hear the prophecy, and mark his inattention to it, after which we would get the contrast of Argimenes in the slave-fields, followed by the revolt, and the overthrow of Darniak. This revolt would follow immediately and logically upon Argimenes' slaughter of the slave-guard in act two. There is little question in my mind but that this is the proper construction for the play.

It may be well to take up here a question which has arisen concerning the acts or scenes of the Dunsany plays. When William A. Brady produced "The Gods of the Mountain" in America he called it upon the programme "A One Act Play in Three Scenes", whereas Dunsany himself calls his divisions, acts. When "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" and "The Gods of the Mountain" were produced by Stuart Walker in his Portmanteau Theater he had no hesitation in using the term "acts." But of late the point has again arisen so that it seems desirable that we pause long enough to investigate the matter more deeply.

A play is a series of minor climaxes leading to major climaxes which in turn lead to an ultimate climax. A one-act play is a series of minor climaxes leading to one major climax which is in itself the ultimate climax. A three-act play has the major climaxes near the end of each act, and the ultimate climax near the end of the second act or during the third. A four or five act play is susceptible to the same course of reasoning. I fear that my phraseology is somewhat involved, but I have striven to be exact.

Let us try this dictum on "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" and see whether or not it will stand the pragmatic test. Be it understood that these major climaxes are as a rule placed at such points in the action as will tend to divide the play conveniently. This is merely a convention of the dramatic art. Dunsany's acts are shorter than is customary, but that does not invalidate their claim to be called acts in the least, for acting time has nothing to do with the question, except as it might tend to produce lack of balance and unity. Broadly speaking acts are natural divisions produced by emotional or intellectual climaxes.

In the first act of the play under immediate discussion the minor climaxes are the finding of the sword, and the coming of the Overseer, both leading to the major climax, the "Oh" which the slaves give as Argimenes slays the guard. In the second act the Overseer, the Prophet, the entrance of Argimenes, the destruction of Illuriel, the reëntrance of the Overseer, the incident of the King's Great Dog with the cry of "Bones!" all lead to the ultimate climax, where Argimenes orders that the dog be buried

and Zarb cries "Majesty!" Note by the way that the printed version of the play makes Zarb deliver this last speech in a tone of protest, when in reality, as Dunsany himself points out, his tone should show awe. The major climax at the end of act one leads direct to the ultimate climax at the end of act two just as I said it would. "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" is not as good an example as "The Gods of the Mountain" simply because the second is by far the better play. The working out of the rule I have suggested is perfectly plain in them both, however. There can be no question whether or not these plays are written in acts or scenes. "The Gods of the Mountain" is as unmistakably a three-act play as "The Amazons." But before discontinuing the discussion let me append a note to something I said a little while back. I remarked that acts are natural divisions produced by emotional or intellectual climaxes, *but* if such climaxes come at points where an interval would be inconvenient or detrimental to the balance of the play then the necessary divisions must be arbitrarily imposed.

The slave song, the chant of the low born

in the first act of "King Argimenes" and the wine song or the chant of the nobles in the second act are both interesting. When the play was first given at the Abbey Theater one of the old songs of famine time was used for the chant of the low born, and most effectively. It is immensely typical of Dunsany to have these two songs balancing each other, and presenting so forceful a contrast. The play begins and ends with the thought of bones uppermost, and this gives a certain sense of unity in contra-distinction to the otherwise faulty structure. In Argimenes there is a superficial resemblance to Agmar in "The Gods of the Mountain", and in Zarb there is a faint prophecy of Slag in the same play. This does not argue by any means that Dunsany's characters are all types, but it indicates how his characters developed, one growing out of another.

This play should dispose finally of any theory that Dunsany develops his plot at the expense of his characters. See how Argimenes, fallen almost to an animal, regains his individuality under the influence of the sword, and how the slaves, from being mere whipped curs, rise to the point of revolt under the leadership of

Argimenes. Observe the study of meanness and selfishness in the scene of Darniak, the Queens, and the Overseer, and the blind ignorance depicted in the following scene with the Prophet. Here is a social study for us if we care to heed it. And then the reversion to habit in Argimenes when he hears that the King's Great Dog is dead, and his cry of "Bones!", with the awe and wonder of the slaves at the reinstated monarch. It is a most excellent bit of character work on rather broad lines. As might be expected the gods have their share in the proceedings, and the fact that the god of Argimenes was only broken in three pieces while that of Darniak, Illuriel, was broken in seven, is made to serve as a partial *raison d'être* for the action. The last act furnishes a splendid example of peripetia in the fall of Darniak, and the victory of Argimenes.

"King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" is almost a good play. It presents a problem of man as opposed to man as most of the other Dunsany plays do not, and in consequence of this the conception is much less poetic, with none of the grandeur of some of the other plays.

On the other hand, the fact that we are dealing with purely human elements permits more visible opposition and direct conflict, and for this reason one occasionally hears the play placed much higher in the scale than it deserves to be. In its characterization, its dialogue, its flashes of poetry and of wit, the play is well worth serious consideration, but in its conception, and in the faulty construction of its framework it falls far below the standard set by the major portion of Dunsany's work.

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

The first act is outside the wall of the city of Kongros. In the dust three beggars are seated who lament their poverty and that the "divine benevolence" of man is not what it used to be. To the three comes Agmar followed by his servant, Slag. Agmar is a very great beggar. The story of his adventures is told by Slag, and a practical demonstration of his cleverness is given as some citizens pass. The other beggars all fail to receive alms, but Agmar by his pitiful aspect and deep groans moves the passers-by to compassion. A scheme

must be devised to retrieve their fallen fortunes. Oogno suggests that they enter the city as ambassadors from a far country, and Ulf seizes upon this with enthusiasm. Slag, however, says that they do not know his master, and that now they have suggested they go as ambassadors he will suggest that they go as kings. Agmar, who has been thinking, betters even this and says that they will go as gods. He tells of the seven green jade idols seated on the mountain of Marma a few days' ride from the city. Those gods are very potent here, and the beggars shall impersonate them. Agmar sends for a Thief, and tells him to fetch some green raiment, and he sends also for another beggar to make up the quota of seven. The green raiment comes, and Agmar distributes it among the seven, telling them to disguise themselves. The conclusion of this act is particularly fine, presenting as it does a splendid climax to the action, and a most enlightening bit of pure characterization.

ULF. We will each wear a piece of it over our rags.

OOGNO. Yes, yes, we shall look fine.

AGMAR. That is not the way that we shall disguise ourselves.

OOGNO. Not cover our rags?

AGMAR. No, no. The first who looked closely would say, "These are only beggars. They have disguised themselves."

ULF. What shall we do?

AGMAR. Each of the seven shall wear a piece of the green raiment *underneath* his rags. And peradventure here and there a little shall show through; and men shall say, "These seven have disguised themselves as beggars. But we know not what they be!"

SLAG. Hear my wise master.

OOGNO. (*in admiration*) *He* is a beggar.

ULF. He is an *old* beggar.

It is Ulf who voices a fear that what they are to do may be regarded as an impious act, but Agmar quiets him. The curtain falls on the last speech given above.

Act two is in the Metropolitan Hall of the City of Kongros. The beggars are seated in a circle and the citizens are questioning them. Agmar with the aid of Slag succeeds in deceiving them into a half-hearted belief that the beggars are the gods. When doubt is raised Agmar so frightens the citizens that meats are brought as a sacrifice. All the beggars except Agmar eat hungrily. To the citizens they eat like hungry men, but when they see that Agmar abstains they wonder. Agmar says that he,

the eldest of the gods, never eats, leaving that to the younger gods who have learned the bestial habit from the lions. And again he intimidates the citizens. Woldery wine is brought as a final test, and Agmar taking the bowl pours the wine on the ground. The citizens are amazed not so much by what the man does, but by his dignity and the manner of the doing. Through his very acting of the part, he is growing godlike. The citizens retire and Agmar eats, posting Slag at the door as sentinel. One comes running and demands the god who will not eat. The following scene, the concluding one of the act, is one of the most remarkable in dramatic literature.

ONE. Master, my child was bitten in the throat by a death-adder at noon. Spare him, master; he still breathes, but slowly.

AGMAR. Is he indeed your child?

ONE. He is surely my child, master.

AGMAR. Was it your wont to thwart him in his play, while he was well and strong?

ONE. I never thwarted him, master.

AGMAR. Whose child is Death?

ONE. Death is the child of the gods.

AGMAR. Do you that never thwarted your child in his play ask this of the gods?

ONE. (*with some horror, perceiving Agmar's meaning*) Master!

AGMAR. Weep not. For all the houses that men have builded are the play-fields of this child of the gods.

(*The Man goes away in silence, not weeping.*)

OOGNO. (*taking Thahn by the wrist*) Is this indeed a man?

AGMAR. A man, a man, and until just now a hungry one.

Is not this scene beautifully builded? As Agmar talks he gradually assumes the aspect of a god, for his imagination reacts upon him until he seems to shake off his earthly guise. Then on the departure of the Man — or as it is usually played to give better effect, a Woman — he slowly recovers himself in his repetition of, "A man, a man . . ." bringing himself back to earth and to a realization of his position. Agmar is but a leader of beggars; he would have been a great prophet, a captain, and a leader of men but for one thing. He is wholly lacking in that spiritual quality which prompts Ulf to voice his fear that the gods will be angry at their impersonation. Agmar is a mental giant, an imaginative genius, but this great void in his nature is to undo him.

In the third act the beggars are seated on seven thrones rough hewn from rock set up in the same hall that they first entered. For the most part they reek with self-satisfaction. Mlan and Oogno, who represent the physical element, are in a voluptuous reverie over the wines they have drunk and meats they have eaten. They laugh at the people who come to worship them, sneering at their credulity. Agmar rebukes them, saying that when they were beggars they behaved as beggars, but now that they are gods they must behave as gods. Agmar by sheer imaginative power seems to deify himself above the others. The Thief who has been absent among his calling, but unknown to them, rushes in and cries that they are lost, that three days ago two dromedary men were sent to Marma to see whether the gods were still there. There is instant panic. Agmar fights for time, and tries to devise a plan. The citizens enter and announce the two Dromedary Men. Agmar warns them that their doubting will bring a heavy doom upon them and advises them to desist. They refuse, saying that their doubts are mighty. The Dromedary Men are ushered in, and are asked whether the seven

gods are still seated in their thrones at Marma. They are not there! Their shrines are empty! The gods are indeed come from Marma! The citizens are reassured and retire to prepare a feast for the beggars whom they now believe to be the true gods beyond all question. The beggars are mad with joy. They are saved. Only Agmar wonders. Something has come to pass which was unforeseen by him. He saw the seven gods there at Marma as he passed by not long ago. He cannot understand. He represents the wholly mental element as Oogno and Mlan represent the physical, and now something has happened that his intelligence cannot compass. Ulf tells of a dream he has had in which there was a fear. Ulf is the only one who is susceptible to spiritual instincts; he may be said to be the prophet of the gods. Suddenly a frightened man runs in and throws himself down before them. He implores them not to walk at night around the city, and he describes how they appeared to him and to others — all green, and blind, and groping. The beggars cannot understand, but they begin to wonder. Agmar now feels his grasp on the situation slipping from him. He feels the

Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

Agmar threatens the citizens with a doom

presence of some force which is superior to him — and he fears. In spite of this he reassures the man and sends him away, but when the other beggars ask for explanations he cannot give them. There is the sound of a heavy, measured tread approaching. Can it be the dancing girls who walk so slowly and with such an ominous sound? Ulf springs to his feet and permits his fear to cry aloud — they have been impious and retribution will overtake them. His fears shall cry aloud and shall run before him like a dog out of the city. The great steps come nearer. Seven huge stone gods enter, and despite the efforts of the beggars to escape they are held by some mysterious power and are unable to resist.

(The leading Green Thing points his finger at the lantern — the flame turns green. When the six are seated the leader points one by one at each of the seven beggars, shooting out his forefinger at them. As he does this each beggar in his turn gathers himself back on to his throne and crosses his legs, his right arm goes stiffly upward with forefinger erect, and a staring look of horror comes into his eyes. In this attitude the beggars sit motionless while a green light falls upon their faces. The gods go out.)

(Presently enter the Citizens, some with victuals and fruit. One touches a beggar's arm and then another's.)

CITIZEN. They are cold; they have turned to stone.

(*All abase themselves, foreheads to the floor.*)

ONE. We have doubted them. We have doubted them. They have turned to stone because we have doubted them.

ANOTHER. They were the true gods.

ALL. They were the true gods.

It is probable that there has never been a play more gigantic than this in conception. The fatality which Dunsany shares with the Greek dramas is here in its most perfect form. As Mr. Björkman remarks, "The crime of *hybris* which to the Greeks was the 'unforgivable sin' is here made as real to us as it was to them." Five of the beggars are purely physical, and they are shown as wholly subservient to the great intellect of Agmar; they themselves have nothing of the mind or spirit; they care for nothing but food, and wine, and dancing girls. Agmar is another Nietzsche; he is all brain, and his limitations are those of the fallible human intelligence. Ulf is a prophet of the spirit, but his mind is not strong enough to combat that of Agmar even though his instincts rebel against the projected imposition. But all through the play his forebodings warn us of

the approaching peril. It is only when Agmar comes in contact with the spiritual essence, the divine force, that he is frustrated and ruined. Here is something which he did not consider and could not account for. That which is beyond and above the grasp of mere mind has crushed him with an ease and implacability which he could never foresee. Throughout the play I have pointed out how from time to time Agmar seemed to rise almost to divine heights, but it was never more than a "seeming." His divinity was a matter of imagination, and of cold logic; it never rose above the stratum of the mind. Hence when he is at the last confronted with that which he tried to imitate, his whole structure is shattered in an instant. The old saw that "you can fool a man with a stuffed dog, but you can't fool a dog" is very applicable to the relation between the citizens and the beggars. Humanity is fallible; only the gods are omnipotent.

By the foregoing it will be seen that I have read no little symbolism into "The Gods of the Mountain." It is not only permissible but even inevitable that this should be so, but still I feel called upon to defend my position

in the face of Lord Dunsany's oft repeated statement that his plays have no hidden meaning. A writer is often wholly unconscious of what lies beneath the surface of his work. He may tell a story and see nothing himself but the story, and yet that portion of him which is apart from his objective consciousness may have written heavily between the lines. It is here that one must step in to interpret, a dangerous task and full of pitfalls, striving to deduce from the more obvious import the underlying and subconscious motive. "The Gods of the Mountain" taken only as a tale fulfills its purpose splendidly, but it is quite fair to take it as more than that, provided only that in our effort to interpret we do not misconstrue. Several of Dunsany's plays are distinctly symbolic in character, but the symbolism is wholly unconscious, and therein differs from the deliberate symbolism of one such as Maeterlinck. With Dunsany the symbolism arises from the story; with Maeterlinck the story arises from the symbolism. It is simply a difference in point of view, but this difference is vital.

From a standpoint of dramatic technique the play is almost perfect. The plot is unified

and well constructed, unfolding gradually and smoothly. The character development is masterly, rising to splendid dramatic heights. The climaxes are quite perfect in themselves, (the final scenes of acts two and three are strokes of pure genius) and every line advances the movement. It has been found that to some act two has too little definite action, and this may be explained by saying that here again we are confronted with the difficulty of providing an obvious opposition when one of the contending forces is an abstract element. The criticism is entirely captious, however, for in act two the character development is keen and vivid. Hence those who are disposed to criticise the play on these grounds, are as a rule those who would much prefer the old Drury Lane melodrama to the modern and more artistic play. If there is not always physical action in this play there is at least always plot and characterization, which is a much better thing.

There is just one error in "The Gods of the Mountain", and this is an error which is repeated in another of the Dunsany plays, namely, that of bringing the gods themselves on the

stage. This is a matter of applied psychology, and of stage mechanics. One can imagine much more terrifying things than one can construct. When the gods are merely talked of, when they are only heard, and when their presence is but suggested, the imagination will conjure up a picture much nearer to that which the artist desires to convey than when we actually see the gods in person. It is impossible so to construct them as to present a really adequate sense of illusion. Gigantic and grotesque as they are they will always fall far short of what they ought to be. This comes of trying directly to embody an abstract force. It cannot be done. It is like trying to bring Truth or Beauty before us; it is impossible. True we can symbolise Truth and Beauty, and just here we are provided with a point of escape. The gods can be symbolised. Very well, then, and how shall such symbols be manifested? When the Dunsany gods come on the stage the criticism is usually that though they are obviously not men they partake too greatly of the human element. The only way to avoid this is to make them more so; that is, to make them more like Man than men them-

selves. In the same way the Venus de Milo is more like Woman than the average female. They must not be something different because they cannot be made different enough; hence they must be simply the same, only more so! It is a question not of realization, but of idealization. In my opinion by far the better plan would be not to attempt to bring the gods on the stage at all. "The Glittering Gate" illustrates this perfectly. Then while everything would be done to suggest, nothing would be done to satisfy the suggestion, and the imagination would be left free to spin its own texture of immensity. Realization always falls short of expectation; nothing really is as terrible as we think it is going to be, and so it is by all odds best to rest content with the thought, sure that the embodiment would be no more than disillusioning. With this one exception "The Gods of the Mountain" is a practically flawless play. And be it noted in this connection that it is not the dramatist who is at fault in this, but the man of the theater, and Dunsany does not pretend to be that.

This play is the only one of Dunsany's which has had a failure in production, and that failure

has since been notably retrieved. When William A. Brady brought the Haymarket production to Buffalo it failed. There were two reasons for this. First, the bill consisted of two plays of which "The Gods of the Mountain" was the second, and the bill was far too long. The audience did not leave the theater until almost midnight, and no play could be expected to succeed with such a handicap. Next, the production was very inadequately rehearsed, so inadequately in fact that the gods are said to have fallen over each other as they made their entrance. I simply desire to point out that Dunsany's one failure has been through no fault of his own.

If "The Gods of the Mountain" were a second "Hamlet" we should have the background sketched in for each of the characters, giving us a personal interest in their problems which is now somewhat lacking. Agmar's tragedy would be almost unbearable if we had a deep personal interest in him. It is man in his relation to the gods and not to himself or to his neighbor which we are called upon to observe, and so the personal touch, the human element, is not there. There is something greater

there, but it is not enough. If the two lesser requirements were fulfilled as the one greater is, the play would be perhaps one of the greatest in all dramatic literature. As it is, it is a masterpiece.

The plot advances to its conclusion with utter inevitability, punctuated by the forebodings of Ulf, who sniffs the approach of Nemesis as a trained dog flinches at the smell of death. It is impossible to praise the play too highly in this connection. The characterization is clean cut, and vivid, the lack of background accounting for the fact that the outlines of the personalities are somewhat oversharp. They have to be in order that they may stand out properly. Dunsany has never surpassed in his dramatic writings the poetry of Ulf's wailing warning of their doom in the last act. Agmar too has in several places, notably the end of act two, wonderful magic lines, poignant and bitter sweet with beauty.

THE GOLDEN DOOM

The scene is outside the King's great door in Zericon, and the time is some while before

the fall of Babylon. Two sentries guard the door and talk meanwhile of the heat and the cool of the nearby river. They talk also of the great King, and one of them feels a sense of menace as if some doom hung heavy. A star has fallen, and that may be a sign. A little boy and girl come in. The boy has come to pray to the great King for a hoop, but he cannot see the King so he prays to the King's door instead.

BOY. King's door, I want a little hoop.

The girl tells of a poem she has made and then proudly she recites it.

I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky
And it went up, and up,
And round about did fly.

BOY. I saw it die.
GIRL. That doesn't scan.
BOY. Oh, that doesn't matter.

The King's Spies cross the stage, and the girl is frightened. The boy tells her that he will write her verses on the King's door, and at this she is greatly delighted. And so he writes the verses, appending the last line he added. The girl again protests, but the line is written.

The sentries have hardly noticed the children, but now they hear the King coming so that they drive the youngsters away. The King comes with his Chamberlain, and as he nears the door he sees the writing on it. He questions the sentries but they say that no one has been near the door; it does not occur to them to mention the children. The King fears that this writing may be a prophecy. The Prophets of the Stars are summoned and are commanded to interpret the prophecy of the writing on the King's door. They cannot do so, but each one silently covers himself with a great black cloak, for they believe the prophecy to be a doom. The Chief Prophet is summoned. He reads the writing and says that the King can be no other than the purple bird, for purple is royal; he has flown in the face of the gods and they are angry. It is a doom. The King offers a sacrifice. He says that he has done his best for his people; that if he has neglected the gods it was only because he was concerned with the welfare of his subjects on earth. The King and the Chief Prophet discuss the most suitable sacrifice, and finally decide that the King's crown as a symbol of

his pride shall be offered. The King asks only that he may rule among his people uncrowned, and minister to their welfare. So the crown is laid on the sacrificial block before the King's door, and as the night comes on and it grows dark so that the stars may be seen, everyone goes away.

BOY. (*enters from the right, dressed in white, his hands out a little, crying*) King's door, King's door, I want my little hoop. (*He goes up to the King's door. When he sees the King's crown there he utters a satisfied*) O-oh! (*He takes it up, puts it on the ground, and, beating it before him with the sceptre, goes out by the way that he entered.*)

(*The great door opens; there is light within; a furtive Spy slips out and sees that the crown is gone. Another Spy slips out. Their crouching heads come close together.*)

FIRST SPY. (*hoarse whisper*) The gods have come!

(*They run back through the door and the door is closed. It opens again and the King and the Chamberlain come through.*)

KING. The stars are satisfied.

So the play ends, on the high note, the major chord always.

The play like others of Dunsany's represents the expression of an abstract idea, and that idea not a particularly dramatic one. Again

Photo by J. M. Cummings. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

THE GOLDEN DOOM

The Chief Prophet interprets the writing on the door

we have the cosmic, the godlike viewpoint, detached, impersonal and vast. A King's crown and a child's hoop are weighed against each other in the scale, and are found to be of equal importance in the scheme of things. We learn that it is not always the great things, but sometimes the smallest things that overthrow whole kingdoms, that prophets are by no means infallible, and that the gods may speak to us through the mouth of a child.

The "Golden Doom" is well constructed. It builds from the very outset to a triumphant conclusion. But it lacks opposition, conflict. Man is neither opposed to man nor even to the gods. A sacrifice is made; will does not assert itself but bows to the inevitable. As a study of a situation, as the exposition of an idea the play is in its way a masterpiece, but the fact that the forces which are suggested in the action are not contending thins the piece from a purely dramatic standpoint. It is the poet rather than the dramatist who speaks in "The Golden Doom." It may be observed too that it is no personal problem with which we are confronted; it rarely is with Dunsany. We do not feel, nor is it desired that we should

feel, a sense of personal sympathy for the Boy praying for his little hoop, or for the King laying his crown on the sacrificial block. It is Boyhood in the mass, nay, even in the abstract with which we are called upon to sympathise; it is the idea of Majesty which we are asked to pity. It is Man in the conglomerate whole with which we are dealing; not an individual man. It is necessary that this should be well understood, for it is one of the basic principles of Dunsany's work, and it is summed up when I repeat that he is more interested in ideas than he is in people. It is never an isolated individual problem which he attacks; it is rather some one question which is peculiar to humanity as a whole.

It is interesting to observe that while Dunsany does not provide conflict in this play he does provide the next thing to it, contrast, and that in a most effective manner. The whole episode of the children played against the background of royalty with its spies and its prophets is immensely ironic. The point of view of the child, too, with its perfect and wholly unconscious logic, becomes delicious when placed in juxtaposition to the complex outlook

man has built for himself. To understand this play is to understand Dunsany. Invariably he is a scoffer at the subtleties of adult philosophy, and a strong adherent of the clear, unsophisticated point of view of the child. He reduces sophistication to its basic premise of sophistry times without number, only to rise and to attack once more from another direction.

Dramatic technique is largely a matter of dramatic instinct, mixed with a goodly portion of common sense. Dunsany does not pretend to be a technician, but observe how carefully, and yet how easily, we are shown that the King's great door is sacred and must not be touched. A stranger from Thessaly enters at the very beginning of the action and approaches the door. The sentinels warn him off with their spears, and after a moment he wanders away again, having provided the necessary exposition in the most natural manner possible. The atmosphere is heightened, and we hardly realize that we have learned anything of importance. See too how the note of menace is struck at the very outset by one of the sentries who feels a doom and a foreboding. It is not unduly emphasized, but it is there and we at once

feel the force of its suggested terror. From then on we wait, sure that a crisis of some kind is at hand. As I said, the play ends on a major chord, but it does even more than this; it ends at the very moment when it should end, neither too soon nor a moment overtime. This point is true of Dunsany's plays; they begin at the one inevitable moment when they should begin, and they end in a like manner. This is not only true of the plays as a whole, but it is true of every separate scene, and of every speech in the scenes. They are all timed to the minute. The dialogue of Dunsany has been compared with that of Maeterlinck, but the comparison is superficial. Maeterlinck's dialogue is often so vague as to be practically imbecilic in effect, while the dialogue of Dunsany is always terse and to the point: not one word is wasted, there is never a shadow of doubt as to the exact meaning, and every speech carries the action definitely forward. With Maeterlinck too all the characters speak in the style of Maeterlinck, whether they be prince or peasant; there is no attempt to give them a colloquial value. It is here that Dunsany most clearly shows that with his marvelous

imagination he has combined the most acute power of observation. His characters are as real as any to be found next door or on the high-road. It is only the situations which are grotesque, and this very combination of the real and the unreal makes for dramatic effect in a manner of which Maeterlinck for all his genius could not dream. Dunsany has observed and noted, and the results of that observation are as true to life as any preachment of Ibsen's; with Dunsany it is only his terminology that is strange.

For sheer beauty of thought and of expression "The Golden Doom" ranks high among Dunsany's works. It is full of wonderful color, and of that magic atmosphere of which only Dunsany is master. It has a story to tell, and that story is one of the great ones of the world, albeit that the theme is perhaps more suited to the poem than to the play. That is the only flaw in an otherwise faultless bit of work, that the poet has for a moment driven the dramatist to a secondary position. But the work was well worth doing, and who but Lord Dunsany could have written "The Golden Doom"?

THE LOST SILK HAT

This is one of Lord Dunsany's two experiments with a "realistic" background. By realistic I mean here that the action of the piece is set in "a fashionable London Street", and that the characters are such persons as one might expect to meet in such a locality. The acceptance of these self imposed conditions has not, however, restrained Dunsany, in the very least degree, from indulging his fancy, and the result is one of the most amusing light comedies imaginable. There will doubtless be some who will insist on the term farce being used in this connection, but by farce is meant a play where the plot dominates the characterization, and by comedy is intended exactly the reverse. In this play again we find an entire lack of personal background for the characters; they have individuality rather than personality; we are dealing with broad types used for the exposition of certain ideas, but these ideas are exposed through characterization rather than through plot. Hence, if it is necessary to classify the play at all it seems

quite reasonable that it should be dignified by the term of comedy. If it were a longer play, and if the background were painted in, it is entirely possible that we should have been treated to the only perfect comedy of manners since "The Importance of Being Earnest." The outline is all there, ready and waiting.

The Caller stands on the door-step of a house, "faultlessly dressed", but without a hat. He has just proposed to the lady in the house and has been rejected, and in the mad desperation of the moment has fled leaving his hat behind him. His predicament is no slight one. To return for the hat, while a sensible measure, would be an inconceivable anti-climax, and he cannot be ridiculous. Not to have the hat is an equally impossible situation. He cannot go through the streets of London half clothed! A Laborer comes along and the Caller accosts him in the hope that he can be persuaded to recover the hat. He tries to induce the Laborer to come to his aid, he tries even to bribe him, but he only succeeds in arousing the suspicions of that horny handed person to the effect that there is something

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very mysterious about the whole affair. The dialogue between the two is outrageously funny.

LABORER. You aren't going to give me a sovereign, and rise it to two sovereigns, for an *empty* hat?

CALLER. But I must have my hat. I can't be seen in the streets like this. There's nothing *in* the hat. What do you think's in the hat?

LABORER. Ah, I'm not clever enough to say that, but it looks as if the papers was in that hat.

CALLER. The papers?

LABORER. Yes, papers proving, if you can get them, that you're the heir to that big house, and some poor innocent will be defrauded.

And so it goes until the Laborer makes his departure, sure that a crime is on the verge of commission. A Clerk enters and he is approached in the same way, and with the same result. He too is suspicious, but his imagination is not capable of the flights of that of the Laborer. It is rather his sense of propriety that is violated; the situation is unconventional, and therefore improper. He goes away, and the Caller is left alone. Enter the Poet, who having the whole ghastly mishap explained to him is disposed to be indulgent. He philosophises at length upon hats and upon proposals and at length advises the Caller to buy

a bayonet, and join the Bosnians. There, having given up his life for a hopeless cause, he will become immortal. The Caller is furious, and at last decides to go in and get the hat himself, whatever the cost. The Poet pleads with him not to go, for if he does there will be a reconciliation and Romance will be unsatisfied; the Caller will marry the lady, and will have a large family of ugly children. Could anything be more horrible to contemplate? Nevertheless in the Caller goes, and the Poet sits disconsolate on the door-step.

POET. (*rising, lifting hand*) . . . but let there be graven in brass upon this house: Romance was born again here out of due time and died young. (*He sits down. Enter Laborer and Clerk with Policeman. The music stops.*)

POLICEMAN. Anything wrong here?

POET. Everything's wrong. They're going to kill Romance.

POLICEMAN. (*to Laborer*) This gentleman doesn't seem quite right somehow.

LABORER. They're none of them quite right today.

(*Music starts again.*)

POET. My God! It is a duet.

POLICEMAN. He seems a bit wrong somehow.

LABORER. You should 'a' seen the other one.

Curtain.

This is surely a most excruciatingly funny play. The Laborer is one of the best comedy characters I have seen in a long, long while. And just here let me digress sufficiently to remark that, quite unconsciously, I believe, Lord Dunsany has in the Caller and in the Poet drawn two delicious pictures of George Moore and Yeats — both caricatured broadly to be sure, but both recognisable. It may be that it is simply some perverse imp of the grotesque that makes me see a caricature where there is none intended, but the thought has amused me, and so I pass it on in the hope that its humor may not be entirely exhausted.

"The Lost Silk Hat" is not particularly dramatic, even for a comedy; nothing happens. Its carrying power exists almost entirely in the dialogue. But such dialogue! It is not witty, for wit is cold, a Shavian quality, intended not to expose a character, but to make a point, while humor is exactly otherwise. The French are, as a nation, witty; the English are humorous. The deep suspicion, the frank incredulity of the Laborer; the strong common sense of the Caller; the rigid conventionality of the Clerk; and the pure romance

of the Poet are all as clean cut as possible. There is not a single waste word. It is one of the most delicious bits of pure humor that I have ever seen.

Technically, a hard word to use surely in this connection, the piece is well done. The action, such as it is, is rapid, each scene blending easily and swiftly into the next. The necessary exposition is given in a few words which serve not only to elucidate the previous happenings, but also to develop the present situation. This is quite as it should be, but how rarely do we find it! One becomes so used to machine-made drama, that the natural flow of Dunsany is like an echo from another age.

Having pointed out that Dunsany always ends his plays at just the proper moment, I shall now have to qualify the statement by remarking that the conclusion of this particular play would be stronger if the last two speeches were omitted. Whether this is the exception that proves the rule or not, I do not know, but there can be no doubt but that it is an exception.

Apropos of Dunsany's constant irony there is a slight point which may be worthy of atten-

tion; namely, that it is the satirist who is witty, and the humorist who is ironic. Dunsany certainly comes within the last named category. He is a humorist, even a great humorist, and the final test is that in their very humor his plays border on tragedy. Humor may be turned to tragedy; satire never can be. The chief point of difference between Dunsany and most humorists is that while their outlook is personal his is cosmic. Man regarded in the mass becomes a gigantic joke, his pretence that he is civilised, his assumption of entire free will, and all his foibles of sophistication are entirely comic. It is only when he is regarded individually that he is tragic, and that which makes him so is the very same element that made him comic before. When one thinks of the present war as a whole it is immensely ironic, but when one stops to consider the individual personal problems involved the great irony breaks into an endless series of minor tragedies — minor, that is, in their relation to the whole. Dunsany's outlook is as nearly universal, and hence as nearly detached and impersonal, as may be; he never reaches the personal, he never tries to reach it.

That is at once the cause of his greatness, and the reason why he is not greater.

"The Lost Silk Hat" is no more than a trifle, a spark flecked off the emery wheel of the imagination of the artist, but it is so perfect a trifle, and so brilliant a spark, that a more or less serious consideration of its merits is by no means out of place. The small thing beautifully done is of inestimably greater value than the great thing botched in the making. And perchance in this play we may find a promise of that perfect comedy of manners which Dunsany may one day write. Certain it is at any rate that no one is less interested in such a possibility than Dunsany himself, and for that we can be thankful. He has one receipt for writing a play — when you have a story to tell, tell it — and so long as he adheres to this dogma we can at least be sure that whatever the result may be we shall never lose interest.

A NIGHT AT AN INN

Dunsany says of this play that comparing it to "The Gods of the Mountain" is like comparing a man to his own shadow. That

sums up the case very well. "A Night at an Inn" is indeed a shadow, an echo of the greater work.

The curtain rises on a room in an old English Inn. The Toff, a dilapidated gentleman, is there with his three sailor followers. We learn from the ensuing conversation between the three (the Toff does not enter into the discussion) that a short time ago the party raided an Indian temple, and robbed the idol of its single eye, a huge ruby. Their two companions were killed before they left the country, and even now the three priests of Klesh, the idol, are following after the fugitives in order to visit retribution upon them and regain their own. Albert tells how he gave the priests the slip in Hull. The Toff has brought them here to the old Inn which he has hired for a period of time. The sailors are restless; they see no more danger and desire to be off with their booty. When they tell this to the Toff he bids them take the ruby and go. They do so, but the next moment are back through the door. They have seen the Priests of Klesh who have followed all the way from Hull — eighty miles on foot. The Toff has expected this, and has

Photo by Byron Co., N. Y. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse

A NIGHT AT AN INN

The Toff deceives the Priest into thinking he is dead

acted in consequence. He tells them that they must kill the priests if they ever expect to enjoy the ruby in peace. Through his cleverness the priests are trapped one after the other, and are murdered. The four then celebrate their victory, but one goes out for a pail of water and comes back pale and shaking, disclaiming any part in the ruby. Klesh himself enters, blind and groping. He takes the ruby eye and placing it in his forehead goes out. Then a voice is heard calling one of the seamen. He does not want to go but is impelled by some mysterious force. He goes out, a single moan is heard, and it is over. The next seaman is called, and then the third. Last of all the Toff hears the command and makes his final exit.

ALBERT (*going*). Toffy, Toffy. (*Exit.*)

VOICE. Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Seaman.

SNIGGERS. I can't go, Toffy. I can't go. I can't do it. (*He goes.*)

VOICE. Meestaire Arnold Everett Scott-Fortescue, late Esquire, Able Seaman.

THE TOFF. I did not foresee it. (*Exit.*)

Curtain.

He did not foresee it, just as Agmar did not foresee the result of his impiety. Herein the

two plays are close together, but "The Gods of the Mountain" is immeasurably superior both in conception, and in the handling of its theme. It has poetry, and characterization, whereas the second play is pure melodrama. And certainly it is one of the best melodramas ever written. The one error made in the entrance of the gods in the first play has been repeated here, and with just as detrimental an effect. The same arguments which we considered then apply now and with equal force. It cannot be done. The illusion is destroyed immediately. This is the only error to be found in either play, and it may be said again that it is an error not of the drama, but of the theater.

The construction of "A Night at an Inn" is really magnificent. Gradually it gathers force until it is in the full swing of tremendous action, and having reached the climax it pauses a single instant, and then with a marvelously quick reversal, it pitches down to the end. The "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" is seen; it rapidly spreads over the whole situation, until finally it is dispelled to all appearances, but at the very moment of its disappearance it returns only to envelop the whole action. The

play is extraordinary in its quick movement, its utter surety of purpose, and in the peripetia which gives it the power of its final blow. That is one of the most astonishing things about all these plays; they show a skill, and not only a facility, but a power of handling, which one is much more likely to ascribe to an old hand than to a man who does not make dramaturgy his sole business in life. Dunsany always knows exactly what he wants to do, and exactly how to do it. Under the circumstances this is surely rather astounding. There are more necessary mechanics connected with the drama than with any other form of the literary art. Neither the poem nor the novel has so rigid a structure (the short story may have), and it is therefore surprising to find so complete a control over a medium to which one has not devoted much time and energy. But this is implying that Lord Dunsany has written no other plays than those we know, and this indeed may be the case. We speak of a man's first play, not taking into consideration the many plays he may have written and consigned to the waste-basket. It is often those plays which make a man a writer, just as it is the "scrub" team that makes the

varsity what it is. But all evidence goes to prove that Dunsany's first play was "The Glittering Gate", written for Yeats, and followed by "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior." Both these plays show the hand of the tyro in places, but they both indicate a grasp of form that is amazing. I fear that my use of the word "form" may be antagonistic to those restless spirits who chatter so easily of "freeing the drama from the shackles of dogma." I have a strong inward conviction, however, that when they have rid themselves satisfactorily of the shackles, they will find that somewhere in the scuffle they have lost the drama. However — !

In their sudden reverse twist at the end, Dunsany's plays remind one of O. Henry's short stories. With both writers too the same sense of economy is evident. Not a word could be subtracted from "A Night at an Inn" without its loss being felt. Sometimes this is carried almost to an extreme. Dunsany's imagination outruns his pen on occasion, and there is a paucity of stage "business" in his manuscripts that has made at least one producer gasp. In the plays one sometimes feels that while

all the high lights are present there is a lack of shadowing, of detailed line work which, while not vital, is at least desirable. The plays are never in the least slovenly in workmanship, quite otherwise in fact, but there is present a sense that not enough time has been spent on them to give us all that the author has imagined. This doubtless arises from the fact that Dunsany concerns himself with nothing beyond the story itself. He is not interested in the lights and shadows of a more subtle characterization, and this is without doubt a serious weakness. But it is only in the acceptance of a work of art for what it is, without regrets for what it might have been, that we can arrive at any conclusion.

The resemblance of "A Night at an Inn" to "The Gods of the Mountain" is particularly interesting as showing how effectively the same theme can be treated in separate ways. The Toff parallels Agmar, the sailors are of the same ilk as the beggars, and the gods are always the same. The same philosophy is present in both plays, but the sublime audacity of the first raises it to heights of which the other is not capable. Moreover we are interested in

Agmar as a personal problem, while in the Toff we never feel such interest. The beggars are individualized; the sailors are treated collectively. All this marks the difference between the two plays especially in that one is drama, and the other is melodrama in which the plot motivates the action, as opposed to drama in which the action is motivated by character. "A Night at an Inn" will always remain one of Dunsany's most effective plays because it is so perfect of its kind, although that kind may not be of the highest type. Certainly it shows that Dunsany can provide plenty of action when action is called for. It is vital to the effect of the play that the action be extremely brief after the entrance of Klesh, yet there are still certain definite things to be accomplished. Without conveying a sense of undue hurry, with only such speed as is necessary to keep the pitch, the play is brought to its logical conclusion. There can be no question that, with the exception of the bringing of Klesh on the stage, the play stands the acid test in every particular. It is a thrilling bit of work; a *tour de force* which is reminiscent of the Grand Guignol, but which is wholly lacking in the mor-

bidity that is so characteristic of that Chamber of Horrors.

The idea of dramatic contrast is very interestingly carried out in this play. To take a minor instance, observe how the quiet calm, the detached disinterestedness of the Toff stands out against the sailors with their quicker, easier emotions. In Agmar, and in the Toff, one fancies that the author is unconsciously drawing a picture of himself as he would be with the poet absent. There is a certain vague similarity in the mental attitudes of the three. To return to the contrast; it was surely a daring thing to set so grotesque a conception in so commonplace a background, an old English Inn. One would think that gods and half clothed priests would enter here only to be laughed at. It would seem to be like playing "Macbeth" in evening clothes. It is through sheer skill that the result actually achieved is quite otherwise. From the rise of the curtain the atmosphere is so definite and so tense that there is no possible thought of incongruity. One never has to "get into" the atmosphere of a Dunsany play. The atmosphere reaches out and holds you even against your will. This

is due partly to the fact that Dunsany himself is convinced, and that therefore he is enabled to be convincing. He believes so thoroughly in his own creations, at least while he is working on them, that the audience cannot but feel the force of his belief. More than this it is skill in writing, and, mark you, it is the skill of the poet rather than that of the dramatist. A playwright is able to create an atmosphere of this description only when he is a poet also. The ability of Dunsany to do this and to do it well is one of his strongest assets, and "A Night at an Inn" is a perfect example of this phase.

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES

The place of this play is in the great room of an underground temple situated on the bank of the Nile; the time is that of an early dynasty. The stage is divided into two sections. On the right one may see a steep flight of stone steps leading down to a door which opens into the room itself. The stage is dark. Two slaves come down the steps with torches. They have been ordered to prepare the room for the Queen, who is about to feast there with her

Photo by P. O. Valentine. Courtesy of Neighborhood Playhouse

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES

The Queen welcomes her guests

enemies. They look about the room of the old disused temple and comment upon the strange eccentricity of their mistress. A great table is set in the center and at one end of it has been placed a throne. From the shadow of the throne moves a huge figure, much to the terror of the slaves. It is Harlee, a servant of the Queen. He is dumb, his tongue having been pulled out by the roots. He laughs at the two, and moves to one side. The slaves go, and the Queen with her attendant comes down the long flight of steps into the room. The Queen is young, and slender, and pretty. She bemoans the fact that she has enemies. Her Captains have taken their lands but she knows naught of it. She is plaintive, beseeching, almost querulous as she asks, "Oh, why have I enemies?" Now she has planned this feast of reconciliation. But she is afraid to be there alone with her enemies. She is so small and young; they may kill her. After many doubts and complainings; after much fear and trembling she decided to go through with it. At the top of the steps leading to the closed door appear two of the invited Princes. One of them is distrustful and

does not want to go further. He fears a trap. Finally he induces his fellow to turn back, but as they are about to do so the others arrive and there is nothing to do but to enter. The Princes, a King, and the High-Priest come with their slaves. The Queen greets them timidly. They stand about the room uncertain whether to trust her or not. The old dumb slave of the Queen is at her side, and she murmurs to him, "To your post, Harlee." He goes, though one of the Princes stops him and inquires his mission — but he is dumb. The Queen finally manages to persuade her guests to sit at the feasting board. They fear to eat, and the Queen weeps that they should so distrust her. Moved by her tears they eat. She offers a toast to the future. As they are about to drink it the High-Priest says that a voice has just come to him speaking in his ear telling him not to drink to the future. His fears are laughed at and the toast is drunk. Then the company becomes merry, and jest and story fly across the board. The Queen joins in at first, but when she sees that her guests are occupied she slips from her throne and with her attendant tries to leave the room. She is

stopped at once, for they are distrustful of her still. But she has promised to restore to them the lands she has taken, and they cannot believe that she would harm them. By her generosity she has made them all her friends. The Queen says that she must go to pray to a very secret god, and so she is permitted to depart. She goes out and part way up the steps, while the great door closes fast behind her. The guests try the door when she has gone. It is locked. They fear once more a trap. Slaves are posted at the door with weapons and they all wait in silence for what may come. The Queen above them, unseen and unheard by them, on the steps lifts her voice and prays to old Father Nile. She tells him that she has a sacrifice worthy of him — Princes, a King, and a Priest. She asks that he come and take them from her. She pauses, but there comes no answer. Then she calls swiftly, "Harlee, Harlee, let in the water!" There is another deathly pause. Then, as the lights darken, from an opening in the room below, the water from the Nile pours in, and amid cries and shrieks, the enemies of the Queen are drowned. The water rises up the steps from underneath the door;

as it reaches the Queen she lifts her garment out of its way and then, mounting a step higher, she murmurs voluptuously, "Oh, I shall sleep to-night!" She slowly climbs the steps with her attendant and vanishes.

In the character of the Queen we are confronted with a problem which the play itself does little to solve. Is her act simply a cold blooded deliberate murder, or was it a sudden impulse? Throughout the play she maintains an attitude of injured virtue, and of entire innocence. This pose on her part is stressed until it is unmistakable. Is this hypocrisy or is it natural? If it is natural she could never have done what she did. The two things are wholly incongruous; if she is one she cannot seemingly be the other. One cannot be a sweet and innocent girl and a Lady Macbeth at the same time. On the other hand, if this attitude is merely a pose, why is this not made evident? To keep such a matter from the audience is fatal. There are any number of times when the Queen could have thrown off the mask, but she never did so. The result of all this has been to make the character of this royal lady extremely obscure. We all

Photo by P. O. Valentine

THE QUEEN'S ENEMIES

The Queen reassures her guests

agree that it is a most interesting play, but what is the mystery of the Queen? She is not consistent; nor is she even consistently inconsistent. The fact that she told Harlee early in the action to go to his post, and then later called to him to let in the water surely indicates beyond question that the murder was most carefully planned and arranged for. The very fact of the feasting place, underground and on the bank of the Nile, suggests this also. But the character of the Queen as it is shown us does not suggest it in the slightest degree, and the sign-posts which I have just mentioned are too slight to afford adequate warning. Hence the Dunsanyesque surprise at the end of the play comes with an unexpected shock; the characterization so carefully built up is shattered in an instant, and we are left to gasp in amazement at what seems an utter incongruity. Surprise calls for careful preparation, and here there is little or none of it. In both "The Gods of the Mountain" and "A Night at an Inn" the sense of menace and foreboding is gradually built up until the event of which it gave warning has transpired. But in "The Queen's Enemies" we are shown a woman

who is one thing and who does another without warning or explanation. Our sense of the fitness of things is violated. It is bad dramaturgy somewhere.

It so happens that Lord Dunsany has himself furnished the key to the problem, and before discussing the play further I will submit his own explanation. The Queen is wholly unconscious of any wrong doing. She is an æsthete; anything ugly either in itself or in its effect upon her is to her a distinct immorality, something to be obliterated from the face of the earth, to suffer nothing but annihilation. Being this she is of course sublimely selfish. She is selfish too in the absolute, not the relative sense. If a dirty child brushed against her she would kill that child. And yet she is of the most delicate sensibility; these things hurt her, and she blots them out of existence not because she feels a satisfaction in the act — there is no sense of vengeance, or of malice — but because she believes it to be a divine duty to rid the earth of that which she deems a painful disfigurement. So when she prays to Father Nile to send the water she fully believes that in offering this sacrifice she is performing a holy

task — albeit a most unpleasant one. But, being a woman, she does not rely too greatly on Father Nile, and has placed Harlee at the flood-gates, so that if the deity does not respond the sacrifice will still be accomplished. And afterward, when the water rises from the flooded room up the steps to the hem of her garment, knowing that those who were a menace to her, who haunted her bedside, driving slumber into the shadows, and who were to her the very apotheosis of all that is evil because they balked her will, were gone for ever, she revels in that which she has done, knowing that her offering to the gods will bring to her the rest and peace she desires. She is an æsthete wholly without a moral sense; which is to say, only a sensualist.

If this were all brought out in the play it would be very well, but it is not so brought out. Lord Dunsany has attempted a characterization which was beyond him considering his lack of entire acquaintance with his medium. I have pointed out several times before that he did not as a rule furnish that background so necessary to vitalize a character into a living personality, but never before has there been the same need for so doing. Now such a background

is imperative, and the fact that it is not there has frustrated his design. The play is intended to be an immensely subtle characterization. Dunsany's tendency to show only the high spots has reduced the subtlety to intelligibility in this instance. It was vital that the background should be filled in. The play is interesting, and has been successful because of its atmosphere, and of its action. But the motivating force of this action is entirely obscure. The play is like a book in which one sees only the chapter headings and the illustrations.

For several reasons I am inclined to suspect that Dunsany intended in this play to convey the idea that the Queen was in reality not at all different from the ordinary woman, indeed that she typified in this phase of her character Woman in the generic sense. The moral would be in that case that women are utterly ruthless in their pursuit of whatever they desire, and that anything which stands in the way of such a pursuit is to them merely an evil to be extinguished. This attitude on the part of Lord Dunsany toward woman in general I shall take up more in detail a little later, as it applies to several of the plays. As Miss Prism remarked

to Dr. Chasuble in "The Importance of Being Earnest", "A misanthrope I can understand — a womanthrope, never!" I think it is perfectly safe to acquit Lord Dunsany of being a "womanthrope"!

It has been suggested several times that the play would have been vastly improved if it had been a short story; that the drama was not the medium for this theme. To a certain extent this theory is tenable. The story writer can fill in a mass of detailed characterization in description which the dramatist must express in terms of action, a much more difficult task. Hence there are undoubtedly some themes which the playwright would do well to leave to his fellow craftsman. I do not believe, however, that this is one of them. I see no reason why the story of this unconsciously cruel Queen, for all her subtlety, should not be told in dramatic form. The best solution would probably be to give the play another act, making the present act the second. In act one all necessary background could be given quite easily and dramatically through some incident or episode which would suggest in itself all that has been omitted in the present version.

"The Queen's Enemies" is one of Lord Dunsany's poorest plays. And though this be true it has been successful and deservedly so. It tells an interesting story in a most dramatic manner; it has atmosphere and color, and it shows amusingly how much better Dunsany is at his worst than many others at their best. I class the play as I do because it fails of the purpose for which it was intended. It set out to show something, and it failed to show it, and in the failing it obscured the action. The salient point of the play, its real *raison d'être,* is the underlying motive which prompts the action, and this motive is so vague as to be incoherent. That which remains, the action itself, saves the piece, but it is not enough to turn the play into that which it would have been had the whole motivation been apparent. That such motivation was intended is very evident, and that the intention was not carried out is equally so.

As for the poetry of the play, that lies hidden for the most part with that portion which has never seen the light. It is not there; the most that we can say is that if the play had been written as it was intended, it would have been.

I may seem to have devoted an over-amount of space to the faults of "The Queen's Enemies", and to have been even captious in my criticism of it. The play which has few or no flaws, and is able to stand upon its own feet, naturally requires less attention than that play of which the reverse is true. If a thing is good, and if we like it, we do not have to have it explained to us. But to understand an evil is to forgive it — which applies here, bad paraphrase though it is.

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

As we are dealing with the plays in chronological order it should be mentioned that it is the first production of "The Tents of the Arabs" in November of 1916 which suggests the inclusion of the play at this particular point. It was published in magazine form some two years before it was produced.

The scene is outside the gate of the city of Thalanna, and the time is uncertain. Bel-Narb and Aoob, two camel drivers, sit at the gates and look down upon the city. They talk of cities and of the desert, of the splendour of the one and of the dreary waste of the other. For

long they talk, wishing that their lot were cast among the crowded places, and that they did not have to venture their lives among the sand storms. They are on their way to Mecca, and the voices of their fellow pilgrims are heard calling them to come. They go, and hard upon their departure the young King enters, followed shortly by his Chamberlain. The King is very bored with the council chamber, and the court; he is tired of the walls that hem him in, and weary with the heavy responsibilities which have been forced upon him. They have sent for a Princess to marry him, and this is not because of love, but for the good of the State only, and the King is sad. He longs for the desert, for the great quiet, and rest, and for the tents of the Arabs. He has known cities too long and he is weary. He says he will go to the desert for a year, and though the Chamberlain does his best to restrain him he is decided. The Chamberlain conspires to have his escort bring him back very soon, for when the King is gone there are no favors to be given. But the King slips away alone, and mounting a camel is soon lost among the sand hills.

Photo by Frank Scott Clark. Courtesy Arts and Crafts Theater

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

Bel-Narb and Aoob before the gates of the city

The second act shows us the same place after the passing of just one year. The King sits on the sand and by him sits the gypsy girl of the desert, Eznarza, whom he loves. She knows who he is and that he must leave her, and they talk there sadly of their parting.

KING. Now I have known the desert and dwelt in the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA. There is no land like the desert and like the Arabs no people.

KING. It is all over and done, I return to the walls of my fathers.

EZNARZA. Time cannot put it away, I go back to the desert that nursed me.

KING. Did you think in those days on the sands, or among the tents in the morning, that my year would ever end, and I be brought away by strength of my word to the prisoning of my palace?

The King tries to persuade Eznarza to come with him, and to live with him in his palace, but she will not, for a gypsy cannot live in the great walled city. She tells him that he must go back and marry his Princess. And then she asks him to come with her, to forget Thalanna, to return and dwell with her among the tents of her fathers. But this he cannot do, for he has given his word that he will return,

and the city must have a King. The Chamberlain and his follower come in; they are expecting the King. They do not notice the two on the sand. Bel-Narb and Aoob enter, for they have returned from their pilgrimage. The Chamberlain speaks to the noble who accompanies him, and as it is past the time they feel sure that the King has died within the year and will never return to them. They cover their heads with dust. Bel-Narb, who has been listening to this, suddenly goes up to the Chamberlain and says that he has returned, that he is the King. The Chamberlain doubts, surely he has changed most greatly in the year, but surely also the desert changes men. The King has started to his feet, but he does not interfere. As the Chamberlain hesitates, the King, half covering his face with his cloak as an Arab, says that he has seen Bel-Narb in Mecca and has there known him for the King. This confirmation is all that is needed. At once Bel-Narb is recognized by Chamberlain and noble alike. Aoob joins his voice to the chorus of recognition. The King on being questioned says that he is but a poor camel driver, and when they wish him to go to the temple to be rewarded he

refuses, for he must return to the desert. The King and Eznarza are once more left alone. The people of the city are only fools, and now they have a foolish King. The rightful King and the gypsy will return to the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA. We shall hear the sand again, whispering low to the dawn wind.

KING. We shall hear the nomads stirring in their camps far off because it is dawn.

EZNARZA. The jackals will patter past us, slipping back to the hills.

KING. When at evening the sun is set we shall weep for no day that is gone.

EZNARZA. I will raise up my head of a night time against the sky, and the old, old unbought stars shall twinkle through my hair, and we shall not envy any of the diademed queens of the world.

Curtain.

It is a beautiful story; one almost hesitates to call it a play, although it is one. But in it the poet has spoken more loudly than the playwright. In the first extract I quoted you will notice how perfect the hexameter lines are through the first four speeches and the first part of the next. The following also is really very lovely in its delicate and subtle beauty.

KING. Who is this little child that is mightier than Time? Is it Love that is mightier?

EZNARZA. No, not Love.

KING. If he conquer even Love, then none is mightier.

EZNARZA. He scares Love away with weak, white hairs and with wrinkles. Poor little Love. Poor Love, Time scares him away.

KING. What is this child of man that can conquer Time and that is braver than Love?

EZNARZA. Even Memory.

And a little later Eznarza says again that "We have only that little child of man, whose name is Memory." Dunsany has the trick of repeating words, phrases and thoughts until they seem to catch a swinging rhythm of their own. Alfred Noyes does the same. Perhaps it is a quality of the lyric poet, though Dunsany deals with the epic rather than with the other form. But they are both poets, be it lyric or epic. The quality that I have mentioned has the ability to transmit an element of sentiment to verse, for sentiment is a matter of association, and collation, the recalling of an emotion through its recurrence.

This is the only Dunsany play which contains anything nearly approaching a love story.

The story here is passionless, though it is beautiful. For once the woman is not satirised or poked fun at; for once she is allowed to live and be beautiful. But even so one somehow feels that she is here rather as a quality than as a personality. She is only a part of that desert life which calls the King. It is not the desert which is a background for their passion, for their passion is but a part of the background. At any rate, the play comes near to being a study of human relations, though it is not. It may seem to be, and we may for an instant be tricked into thinking that here is Dunsany in a new mood, showing us man in his relation to man, or to woman, but this is not true. What the play really tells us is that Kings and cities are of little account in the great scheme of things; that the dreamer in the tents of the Arabs fulfills his destiny far better than the monarch, for a crown may crumble, while only dreams are eternal. When Bel-Narb goes to the city as King we see the false reigning over the fallacious; and when the King returns with Eznarza to the desert we see him who has found truth accept and embrace it. Like to like they return to each other forever.

The second act of the play is better than the first, because the finest poetry of the play is in that act, and because that act contains the only drama, the scene where Bel-Narb passes himself off as the King. There is not another dramatic scene in the play. The witchery of the atmosphere, the music of the lines, the beauty of the thoughts, the poetry and magic of the expression are what make the play really fine. There is no drama. One may be permitted to do this and still have a play when one is done, if one can do it in this wise. For the result will hold an audience, and there is form in the structure. A play is little more than this. There are several opportunities for strong dramatic action in the last act, but they have all been passed over. It seems to me right that this should be so, for the introduction of any element of violence, even though it does not express itself in physical terms, would be entirely out of keeping with the rest of the play. The delicacy of the whole conception would be thrown out of key by a note too hot with passion. In the play we see that world in which our bodies are contend with that greater world of the spirit, and we see the first

world lose. "The Tents of the Arabs" may be said to be perhaps the least dramatic, and the most poetic of Dunsany's plays. Were it not that its poetry is very exquisite the play would sink to an insignificant place in relation to the others; as it is we can never forget it.

There are two plays of Lord Dunsany's which have neither been produced nor published. These are "The Laughter of the Gods" and "King Alexander." Of the first I know only that it is about the length of "The Gods of the Mountain", and that, though the gods are there, they never come on the stage. It is said to be one of Dunsany's finest pieces of work, and I regret that I have not been privileged to read the manuscript up to the present. The second play deals with that Alexander of history, so I suppose one may call it "historical" in a certain sense. But from what I know of Lord Dunsany I am strongly of the opinion that its historical value is not its salient feature. That is reassuring at any rate. Lord Dunsany started to collaborate with Padraic Colum in the writing of this play, but when Mr. Colum saw how little the play was his, and how much Dunsany's, he decided

that he had better give the manuscript over. It would have been interesting had this collaboration been carried to a conclusion, but it is probable that each man was too great in himself to write with another. Collaboration usually means compromise, and genius compromises with nothing.

THE TALES

Beside his plays there are to Lord Dunsany's credit seven volumes of short tales; I call them tales for want of a better title. Sometimes they are mere random thoughts jotted down seemingly until such time as they found place in some more pretentious form. The book of "Fifty-One Tales" might so be described almost as a note-book, so fleeting, and so incomplete are some of the conceptions; yet there are others of which one might say that to write them alone was to have at least a finger upon immortality. There is not one of them which is not beautiful in thought and in expression. They give too strange inner glimpses of the man's philosophy, his entire loyalty to beauty, and his disgust of com-

promise. Baudelaire might have written them so far as form is concerned, but the point of view, and it is that which makes them important first of all, is Dunsany's alone. In some of the longer tales one may find pure metrical flights of surpassing loveliness, almost sensuous in the long swinging hexameters which are so reminiscent of the Greece by which they were doubtless suggested. The following fragment by the change of a syllable here and there is a perfect example of this phase:

"Clad though that city was in one robe always, in twilight, yet was its beauty worthy of even so lovely a wonder; city and twilight both were peerless but for each other. Built of a stone unknown in the world we tread were its bastions, quarried we know not where, but called by the gnomes *abyx*, it so flashed back to the twilight its glories, color for color, that none can say of them where their boundary is, and which the eternal twilight, and which the City of Never; they are the twin-born children, the fairest daughters of Wonder. Time had been there, but not to work destruction; he had turned to a fair, pale green the domes that were made of copper, the rest he had left untouched, even he, the destroyer of cities, by what bribe I know not averted."

This is from a tale in "The Book of Wonder", which Dunsany calls "A Chronicle of Little

Adventures at the Edge of the World." The Preface to this volume is very charming, and is even remindful of another invitation extended to us all some hundreds of years ago: "Come with me, ladies and gentlemen who are in any wise weary of London: come with me: and those that tire at all of the worlds we know: for we have new worlds here."

It is in "The Gods of Pegana" that Dunsany creates that mythology upon which so much of his work is founded. He is discovered here playing with his gods as with a new toy, tender, ironic, and severe as the occasion seems to warrant. And little by little grew his gods in strength and stature, until they were as gods indeed. In 1912, W. B. Yeats published "Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany", to which Mr. Yeats contributed an Introduction from which I shall quote at length, for it gives an estimate of Dunsany from a fellow craftsman who is always as great in his generosity as in his genius.

"These stories and plays have for their continual theme the passing away of gods and men and cities before the mysterious power which is sometimes called by some great god's name but more often 'Time.'

His travelers who travel by so many rivers and deserts and listen to sounding names none heard before, come back with no tale that does not tell of vague rebellion against that power, and all the beautiful things they have seen get something of their charm from the pathos of fragility. This poet who has imagined colors, ceremonies and incredible processions that never passed before the eyes of Edgar Allan Poe or of De Quincey, and remembered as much fabulous beauty as Sir John Mandeville, has yet never wearied of the most universal of emotions and the one most constantly associated with the sense of beauty; and when we come to examine these astonishments that seem so alien we find that he has but transfigured with beauty the common sights of the world. He describes the dance in the air of large butterflies as we have seen it in the sun steeped air of noon. 'And they danced, but danced idly, on the wings of the air, as some haughty queen of distant conquered lands might in her poverty and exile dance in some encampment of the gypsies for the mere bread to live by, but beyond this would never abate her pride to dance for one fragment more.' He can show us the movement of sand, as we have seen it where the sea shore meets the grass, but so changed that it becomes the deserts of the world: 'And all that night the desert said many things softly and in a whisper, but I knew not what he said. Only the sand knew and arose and was troubled and lay down again and the wind knew. Then as the hours of the night went by, these two discovered the foot-tracks wherewith we had disturbed the holy desert and they troubled over them and

covered them up; and then the wind lay down and the sand rested.' Or he will invent some incredible sound that will yet call before us the strange sounds of the night, as when he says, 'Sometimes some monster of the sea coughed.' And how he can play upon our fears with that great gate of his, carved from a single ivory tusk dropped from some terrible beast; or with his tribe of wanderers that pass about the city telling one another tales that we know to be terrible from the blanched faces of the listeners though they tell them in an unknown tongue; or with his stone gods of the mountain, for 'when we see rock walking it is terrible,' 'rock should not walk in the evening.'

"Yet say what I will, so strange is the pleasure that they give, so hard to analyse and describe, I do not know why these stories and plays delight me. Now they set me to thinking of some old Irish jewel work, now of a sword covered with Indian Arabesques that hangs in a friend's hall, now of St. Mark's at Venice, now of cloud palaces in the sundown; but more often still of a strange country or state of the soul that once for a few weeks I entered in deep sleep and after lost and have ever mourned and desired."

Indeed the tales are very like to the plays except that lacking the fixed quality of the dramatic form they have become even more fanciful. "Fifty-One Tales" is perhaps a little more philosophical in tone; the gentle irony of the author shows itself again and again, sometimes flaring up fiercely in a glow of indig-

nation at the cobbled streets that dare to wander over the dancing places of Pan, sometimes tenderly rebuking those who can see no other beauty than the tall chimneys of factories, and again the spirit changes to a wonder and an awe at the great immensity of existence.

It has been remarked that most of the plays would fit well into the form of stories, and it is quite as true, on the other hand, that many of the stories would do well as plays. Some of them could not be dramatised, they are too light, too fragile, and too lacking in action; but others would be splendid material. The tale of the magic window and of the war in the other world, the story of the quest of the Queen's tears, the dreadful adventure that befell three literary men, would all make plays, and there are many more that would go with them. Yet were they put into dramatic form there would be so much that would have to be lost from them that the change would be of questionable wisdom. For in these tales Dunsany has permitted the bridle rein to droop upon the neck of Pegasus, and that steed has wandered to and fro among the hills and meadows, he has sniffed the woods and has paused to

drink from the stream that runs through the pasture, and all life around him has known a golden and a glorious awakening. So there are some things which are too subtle, and there are some which are too delicate to be transmitted to a play, but though this be so the tales themselves would never have risen to their present importance had it not been that some of their kind were embodied in dramatic form. There is a force, a directness, a concentration, not only of attention, but of energy which gives a carrying power to the play which the tale can never attain. Nor is such attainment intended; the cow and the horse are both noble animals, but we would never look for milk from the latter.

Dunsany's tales convey us to lands that we never before knew existed. His favorite location is that which he calls "The Edge of the World", for the passion for geography is of the school-room, and Dunsany is too big to be confined within the mean and narrow circle of four walls. We may call some of the tales symbolic, and others allegorical, while to nearly all of them we may attribute some deep and hidden meaning that must be frantically

searched for by women's clubs and classes in the drama. Far better is it to take them as they stand, fairy tales for grown ups, whose merit is in the story to be told and in the manner of the telling. What else comes to us easily and naturally from them may be considered as a gift from the gods. It may have been placed there carefully by the author, or he may never have seen it. The last seems to me the only true conclusion. But whatever we find we shall be happier, and even wiser, for it.

III

His Philosophy

Lord Dunsany's outlook on the art of the theater and that of the drama has by no means been confined by local restrictions. In 1913 there might have been seen in the pamphlet issued from Florence by Edward Gordon Craig an advertisement of Craig's school for the art of the theater. An international committee was appointed and the two members for Ireland were W. B. Yeats and Lord Dunsany. There is printed too in the same place a list of the donations and gifts toward this school, and here Dunsany's name "heads all the rest." This is doubtless because his was the only cash contribution; it was certainly a most generous one, consisting of one hundred pounds. What became of the venture, and how Lord Dunsany's hundred pounds were expended belongs to that part of history which is still immured in the

archives of the unknown. At any rate it was a worthy cause, and one which, by reason of its very intangibility, was sure to appeal to both the members from Ireland.

That which is far away always seems to appeal to Dunsany most, and the further away it is the stronger the appeal. When he speaks of "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" as being the first play about his own country he is very evidently not talking about Ireland, but of that mythical land of which he is the discoverer. There is a danger in all this, and it is no small danger. The realm of pure abstraction invites to rest and contemplation, especially after one has been deluged with the opposite phase of life to the point of nausea. But when one wanders so far from the things of every day that one's thoughts seem to have no application to the everyday man, it is high time to pause and consider the possibility of inter-terrestrial communication. There is a point where Dunsany in his effort to deal only with the big things ends by glorifying the little things, by doing the small thing infinitely well, instead of doing the big thing in any manner.

Not once but many times I have compared

Lord Dunsany's work with that of ancient Greece, tracing in his plays and tales a resemblance to the old gods, and to the eternal battle between man and destiny. And I have pointed out the three points of view with which a poet may regard his own creations. But I neglected to say that all three of these points of view are the same. It is necessary for me to talk a little of religion in order that I may make this clear to you. I have no apology for including such a dissertation here, for I am talking of a poet, of one who writes of Beauty; and surely God and Beauty are the same. Lord Dunsany has made his gods to be absolute, omnipotent, divine beyond the very outskirts of the cosmos, and in this I believe he has been mistaken. His gods are those of the ancient Hebrews; they are like the Egyptian gods, for they are implacable and apart. Not so the gods of Greece. Before they became material for the plays and stories of men they had been humanized, they had learned to suffer. Their followers endowed them with the traits of mankind, love, hate, gratitude, and they were even permitted to sorrow. In a word they were not only individual but personal. Then

came the Christian religion founded upon Christ crucified, the greatest and most intimate personification of all. Lord Dunsany has removed his gods too wholly from the lives of men. They are depersonalized, detached, impenetrable, and vast, but they bear no relation to their servant, man. This mythology is wholly of itself, a thing apart, and therein lies its weakness. In the three points of view which I have offered as a basis for discussion, the first two must blend and lose themselves in the last before we can have the perfect, rounded work of art. Man in his relation to himself, and to his fellows, *is* in his relation to the whole, to the cosmos, to God. For while man is not a God, God is a man. The three cannot in reality be considered as separate entities; they are simply the three parts of one great whole. Lord Dunsany has taken one of these parts and has set it aside from the other two; he has isolated it, and differentiated it by every possible means. In this way he hoped to achieve infinity, but in reality he has only imposed a false restriction. God may be infinite, but He is not so in His relation to us, and so when we deal with gods and men we must, by very reason of

the relationship, deal with those gods as finite. This was well understood by the great dramatists of Greece, and it is in the misunderstanding of this eternal fact that Dunsany has handicapped his power. Dunsany has shown us the falsity of the super-man of Nietzsche, but in his place we are given a super-god even more terrible. His place is that of pure abstract thought, devoid of emotion, and so neither in his gods nor in the world they rule do we find a trace of passion either human or divine. It is this that sets his work apart from the lives of men, and it is this which is his greatest limitation. Life is action motivated by emotion. Dunsany deals only with ideas. It is true that those ideas are beautiful, but no matter how beautiful they may be they are nothing more than the unborn children of life. In the dream world he has created we find many of the superficial traits and idiosyncrasies of humanity, and these deceive us into thinking for a moment that his people are even as ourselves. But when we probe deeper we discover that it is all a sham, that not once does a single human emotion show above the surface. If this make-believe world is to remain as calm and as

detached as he would have it there must be no human passion to disturb the quiet of the dream. That is why there are so few women in Dunsany's plays, and that is why, when they do appear, they serve merely as a background or a mouthpiece. For man's relationship with woman is more intimate than any other; it is vitally personal, and it is often great with passion. Intimacy, personality, and passion are three things with which Dunsany's gods may have nothing to do. If they had it might make them less god-like, but certainly it would make them more divine. Dunsany has remembered that in heaven there is "neither marrying nor giving in marriage," but his interpretation has been too literal. Let me say again that while a poet may, nay, must, have his head in the clouds, his feet must touch earth soil.

Dunsany is an æsthete. His beauty is that which we appreciate with our minds, and senses. We see the splendour of the pictures he paints for us, the wonder and magic of his faerie dawns and twilights soothes and dazzles our eyes, but not once do we feel a throb of living emotion. Our ears are enraptured with the music of his lines, we feel the wonderful

rhythm, swing, and beat of phrase on phrase, but not once do we know the poignancy of the familiar. It is all apart. In his scenes, in the times he has given for his actions, in the very costumes of his people there is an effort made to universalize by choosing something which is typical of the whole and yet so different from each part that it cannot be confused with reality. One cannot universalize a thought by making it unlike; it must be more like than the thing itself. It must not be different; it must be even more than the same.

It may be thought that I have devoted much space to destroying that which to all of us has been beautiful. I have not intended to do so. It seems necessary to me to point out that the great fundamental error which Dunsany has made is that he has set himself to find the least common multiple instead of the greatest common divisor. In doing this he has imposed a limitation upon his work which must be recognized. He deals in the most delicate tints and shadings; his writing is a marvelous pastel, but it lacks the vigor and lasting power of oil. And now having said all this I will ask you to forget it, if you have not so far disa-

greed with me as to make such forgetting unnecessary. It is interesting and even important that any work of art should be made to stand the test of analysis, and of comparison, but this test may be considered as a dose of peculiarly nasty medicine which once taken is soon forgotten. It is not what Dunsany should be, or what we would have him be that concerns us. It is what he is. Once the limitations of a work are defined there should be no complaining because the nature of that work does not extend beyond the limitations. We may regret that blue is not red, but it would surely be captious to insist just because it is not, that blue is an imperfect and unpleasant color. Lord Dunsany has given us much that we stand greatly in need of; surely it would be ungracious to complain because it is not more. In an all too sordid day and age, when the romance of the open road seems to have given place to the romance of the counting-house, he has opened anew for us the door of wonder. For this we can never be too thankful. Dunsany has played the perfect host for us in his magic land; he has given us of his best, and we have found that that best is

truly beautiful. He has done a fine, it may not be too much to say a great work, and he has done it with the deftness of the perfect craftsman. And now it is well to let the man speak for himself; it is only just that his voice should be heard in a discussion which touches him so nearly. The following extracts are from an article contributed by Lord Dunsany to the *National Review* of London during 1911, and the title of the article is "Romance and the Modern Stage."

"Something must be wrong with an age whose drama deserts romance; and a cause that soonest occurs to one is the alarming spread of advertisement, its frightful vulgarity, and its whole-hearted devotion to the snaring of money.

"What advertisement (the screaming voice of our age) seeks to be other than a lie, and if the actual statement is literally true, then all the more must the suggestion correct this error by being especially false.

"Everywhere the sacredness of business is preached, everywhere it is pointed to as an end, to this great error advertisements testify alike in all places; children are brought up on them; for everything sublime or beautiful that any city shows them twenty times do they see far more noticeable, some placard sordid with avarice. Advertisements drop from the books that children read, they confront them in their homes.

They stand large between them and the scenery when they travel. Will anyone say that their preaching is neglected; not unless the bill-sticker has lost his cunning. Those who are thus educated will learn to bow down to business. When most we need romance, romance has been frightened away.

"As he steals over dewy hills in the dusk of summer evenings he sees those placards standing in the fields and praising Mammon; to Romance they seem the battlements of the fortress of Avarice, and he is gone at once.

"It is not from business that romance has fled, but from the worshiping of it; the calf was not an unclean beast among the Israelites, but when they worshiped the Golden Calf then God deserted them.

"To-day a work of art must be defended in terms of business. 'What's the use of it?' they will say of some painting, and woe to the artist who cannot answer, 'It brings me in much.'

"A year or so ago this age of ours spoke through the pen of some writer of a brief letter to a journal. The fate of Crosby Hall was being discussed. I do not remember the arguments; it was beautiful, it was historic, and in the way. And the age spoke and said, 'Let us have a little more business and less sentiment.'

"That was the great error put into a sentence which the age inspired its prophet to write to the press.

"Human happiness is nothing more than a fairy ring of human sentiments dancing in the moonlight. The wand that compels them may possibly be of gold. Business, perhaps, may be needed to make them dance, but to think that business, the possible means, should

be more desirable than the certain end showed that that obscure writer whom the age had inspired was ignorant firstly even of himself and the little fanciful things that he intended some day to do. Thus is the end given up for the sake of the means, and truth and beauty sacrificed every day upon innumerable counters, until the generation fostered among these things says to the artist, 'What do you get by it?' and to the poet, 'Does it pay?'

"In discussing the state of the stage one has to watch the affairs of its neighboring kingdoms, the stalls and the pit. If their conditions are sordid, romance will not easily flourish across the border.

"The drama is the mirror of life if not something more. And an age that paints its woodwork red to ape mahogany, that makes respected fortunes by mixing up sulphuric acid with glucose and calling the product beer, the age of flannelette and the patent pill . . . such an age may well have such a drama as will be pleasant and acceptable to the doers of these things: for when insincerity has once raised up its honored head in politics and commerce, as it has, and in daily life as well, it is quite certain that its worshippers will demand a drama sufficiently stale and smug to suit their lives.

"In any beautiful age a poet is scarcely noticed, he is the natural product of the beauty of the time, he is no more than the lilac in the Spring; only in evil days does he appear half-witted, having the foolish look of a lily upon a pavement.

"I am quite ignorant of the cost or feasibility of risking new experiments in the theater. I have no

means or method of producing romantic drama. I should not dare to advise and have nothing to say except to ask that the theater be set up against the false, that the highest realism, the realism of the poets, who see the whole of life's journey, be set up against the lower realism that sees only how man equips himself with morals, and money, and custom for the journey; but knows not where the journey leads nor why man wants to go. That is what we need more to-day than in any age.

"But romance has not been driven from the stage only by those that like the false and the sham — obviously among these romance will not abide for romance is the most real thing in life — but he has been jostled out of the way by the enemies of the shams that are too busy trying to overthrow the false to have leisure to let their fancies dance on the hills. For our age is full of new problems that we have not as yet found time to understand, that bewilder and absorb us, the gift of matter enthroned and endowed by man with life; I mean iron vitalized by steam and rushing from city to city and owning men for slaves. I know the boons that machinery has conferred on man, all tyrants have boons to confer, but service to a dynasty of steam and steel is a hard service, and gives little leisure to fancy to flit from field to field. Machinery has given us many problems to solve, and it may be a long time yet before we make the ultimate discovery that the ways and means of living are less important than life. When every man has recognized that for himself, we shall come out on the other side of all our problems, and laying aside our universal interest in the latest

information about the newest question upon any subject that arises anywhere, we shall come to know a little about something once more, as our forefathers did before the days of encyclopedias. Then we shall have drama again that shall concern itself with life rather than with our anxious uncertainties about it. But the discoveries of steam and electricity which have given life to matter, are as perplexing to every one of us as what came out of the bottle that the Arabian fisherman found, and we have not yet recovered from our perplexity. I am not criticising machinery. I stand in awe of so terrible a genie whose shadow has darkened all the midlands of England; but I mention it to explain the newness and suddenness of our problems, our unfamiliarity with ourselves and the puzzled expression on the faces of all who deal with these things, and the difference between the stories we tell, whereat romance yawns loudly, and the simpler tales and songs of more rural people.

"Romance is so inseparable from life that all we need to obtain romantic drama is for the dramatist to find any age and any country where life is not too thickly veiled and cloaked with puzzles and conventions, in fact to find a people that is not in the agonies of self consciousness. For myself I think that it is simpler to imagine such a people, as it saves the trouble of reading to find a romantic age, or the trouble of making a journey to lands where there is no press.

"It is easy for a philanthropist to endow a hospital, and easy for a benevolent man to work for the sake of the poor, their goal is near to them, logic supports them and reasonable men applaud them upon the way.

But the way of the poet is the way of the martyr. The greater his work the more infinite his goal. His own eyes cannot assess it. There is little logic in a lyric, and notoriously little money. How can an age which values all things in gold understand so unvalued a thing as a romantic fancy?

"The kind of drama that we most need to-day seems to me to be the kind that will build new worlds for the fancy, for the spirit as much as the body sometimes needs a change of scene.

"Every morning railway trains, telegraphs, and motors await to spread the latest information everywhere. Even were this information of value there would be more than men's minds could digest. I do not object to detailed accounts of murder trials, life is at a high tension in a court where a man is on trial for his life; what does the harm is meaningless reports of cricket matches spun out with insipid phrases and newly invented sham slang, which fill a people's mind with nothingness, and are widely read by men who no longer die, but pass away at their residence. Phrases are parasites in the fur of thought and in time they destroy the thing upon which they feed. Many and many an erstwhile clever head pours forth phrase after phrase picked up from to-day and yesterday, behind which thought is dead, and only the parasites left. Too much information about the fads and fashions of empty lives is stealing year by year the traditions and simplicity even of rural people. Yet places remain unaffected by all these things, these are the hunting ground of the dramatist. Then there is the other world — the world of fancy. It seems to me that a

play that is true to fancy is as true as one that is true to modern times, for fancy is quite as real as more solid things and every bit as necessary to a man. A fancy of some sort is the mainspring and end of every human ambition, and a writer who turns away from conventions and problems to build with no other bricks than fancy and beauty is doing no trivial work, his raw material is the dreams, and whims, and shadowy impulses in the soul of man, out of which all else ariseth."

Here we may see Dunsany as a critic, less of the drama than of the age which begets it, and less of the age than of the philosophy which underlies its spirit. One is inclined to wonder too whether the fact of Dunsany's critical ability does not in some wise explain many other things about his work. Often we find him in a critical mood in his tales and plays, and we realize again that good criticism is always creative in the highest sense. But this tendency on the part of Dunsany emphasizes the fact that his outlook is essentially intellectual. Dunsany realizes, but he does not experience; he perceives, but he does not feel. In his desire to get away from the life of to-day he ends almost by getting away from all life. His drama is that of imagination coated with a veneer of observation, albeit

this same observation is of the keenest and most sensitive description.

In his disregard of human relations Lord Dunsany may be compared to many of those who have enlivened literature with the creations of pure fancy. Of such are Hans Andersen, and Grimm; Lewis Carroll, and Barrie likewise belong in this category, but none of these have proceeded to the length which has made Dunsany unique, certainly in the contemporary, and probably in the previous literary age. We have had a literature based on folk-lore more than once; the Greek drama partook of this element, as has the literature of Germany and the northern countries from time to time; it is to be found to-day in the work of nearly all the Irish poets and dramatists. But in every instance this folk-lore has been the gradual growth of centuries until finally it has been preserved for all time upon the printed page. But with Dunsany it is very obviously quite different. He has created a folk-lore, or better, a mythology of his own, and in so doing he has managed to invest it with some of the actual atmosphere of antiquity. The whole conception is a most extraordinary *tour de force.*

This creation has offered him unlimited scope for pure flights of fancy; he is bound down by no possible restriction of time or place, or adherence to tradition. He makes his traditions as he goes along. Actual folk-lore is always closely entwined with the actual religion of its people, and thus it proceeds not only from what men think, but from what they feel. An artificial folk-lore such as Dunsany's, being the product of the imagination of one man, is purely mental, and thus fails to satisfy on one side no matter how beautiful it may be in itself. Imagination is entirely a mental quality. And so, as the greatest art must always be emotion expressed in terms of the intellect, we must convict Dunsany of half measures. He deals not with emotion, but with states of mind, and be it said here again that, lacking or not in the bigger and more vital quality, that which he has given us is of the most surpassing beauty. It is the art of the intellectual aristocrat first, last, and always, and therein lies its weakness; but such as it is, it is a beautiful art. It is not the art of one who feels, it is not even the art of one who thinks, but it is the art of one who dreams.

One could almost wish to discard all the rest and to be content with dreams alone, Dunsany's are so potent in their magic power.

Dramatically too there is a loss to be noted. Dunsany sometimes disregards a dramatic situation in the very fear that it will conceive a human emotion of violence at variance with his established code. There is always one scene in "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior" for which we look from the very outset, and which never comes. It seems almost important enough to be called a *scène à faire.* This is the meeting of the two Kings, Argimenes and Darniak. What a wonderful situation it would be, and how many notes could be touched upon in its rising scale. But it is not there. For the rest I have called attention to them as occasion arose as we discussed the plays, so there is no need to consider them further here. Whatever his shortcomings as a dramatist, and there lives not one, nor has one ever lived, in which some flaws cannot be found, Dunsany has done the remarkable thing of writing plays which are startling in their dramatic power and really fine in their poetry. They are big in conception, and artistic in execution. Their

dialogue might serve as a model for many dramatists who are accounted of more importance than is Dunsany, and their color and atmosphere exert at times an almost hypnotic effect.

It may be interesting to see what Dunsany has to say concerning a fellow worker, Synge, no less, in the London *Saturday Review* during 1910. The following bit is taken from a review of Synge's "Deirdre of the Sorrows", his finest work so far as regards beauty of expression.

"It is so long now since Pegasus shied at a factory whistle or at one of our own ha-penny newspapers blowing down the road, and soared and left the people and remained aloof from them the way he was wont not to do — for the Elizabethans trotted him in and out wherever men sang, or swore, or followed their callings — it is so long now since his ears caught the sound of the streets that it is strange to think of a poet only over the Irish sea writing in a peasantry's common tongue. And this is what J. M. Synge was able to do as Homer was able, and as Keats, for instance, and Francis Thompson, were not.

"Synge is never far away from the fields of men, his is not the inspiration of the skylark remote from the earth; our wonder at his fancy is as our wonder at the flight of the white owl low down near beautiful fields."

For not a little time past we have been possessed of a drama which in its effort to mirror life has gradually become more and more photographic and microcosmic. This is assuredly the art of a mechanical age, an age not of creation but of reproduction. Our music is provided by the phonograph and the mechanical piano; our painting is given us through the medium of the illustrated supplements of the Sunday papers; our drama has degenerated to that point where in its effort to be "real" it has ceased to be anything more than that. What a boon it was to the man of the theater when he found that that which was impossible of achievement on the stage came easily within his grasp in the moving-pictures. Here at least we have real trees, real houses, and real battles. The only thing left to wish for is that the actors be given real guns with real powder and bullets, and that they really discharge these weapons at one another. Perhaps in that way we may, through this very obsession for reality, be rid of some of the most unreal things that ever desecrated the name of art. This realism, or naturalism as it may best be called, rarely has penetrated

beneath the surface of humanity, and though it has on occasion cut below the skin it has never yet touched on that sacred, and therefore shocking thing of which modern society stands so greatly in dread. If it ever had so touched, the white heat of the spirit would have withered it away. We have dealt with the isolated example, with the abnormal instance; why, no one can tell unless we admit to a morbid curiosity. It is the age of science, and we have applied the rules of science to the principles of art — and we have failed most miserably. There is every indication that this phase is well on its decline. There is every reason to believe that the romantic renaissance for which we have been waiting is at last within reach. We have a "new art of the theater" which is in reality an old art revitalized and brought up to date. Let us be thankful for it. It is what we need. We may even begin to see signs of a "new" drama, and for this let us be thankful also. We need it as a dying man needs life.

We call one man a realist because he deals in strange mental conditions, and we call another man a romanticist because he deals with common emotional conditions. Person-

ally I am strongly of the conviction that the romanticist is the more real of the two by far. Lord Dunsany does not come under either heading according to this definition. That is because both the realist and the romanticist deal with life, though from different points of view. Lord Dunsany deals not with life, but with dreams. For long it has been forgotten that there were dreams, except when one had eaten too much lobster in some gilded restaurant after seeing a bad play. And then the dreams were not such as to make one desire them. It had almost passed beyond our recollection that there was a land in which realist and romanticist ceased to exist in themselves and blended into one. Dunsany has taught us again the name of that land, and he has called it Wonder. There we find no dramatist who may be labelled with a scientific name; there is only the dreamer. To him all things are possible, and the stranger they are the more probable is their happening. As in this life of the flesh we catch fleeting glimpses of that other life which has no boundaries, so in that life do we see now and again something which may remind us of the existence we have left

behind. The dream world is not empty for us; the land of wonder is peopled thickly with those who are glad to give us welcome; the people of the hills are there and waiting.

Dunsany has opened for us the great gates leading into that other world so near, and yet so distant from us all. Like all the little people his creatures have no souls, for if they had then Time might overtake them. For the only thing in all the whole wide world that is imperishable, the only thing that Time stands baffled before, is a dream, even a little one. And that is most of all what Dunsany has told us, that a too great intensity of interest with the things of everyday life, the transient things, is just so much ground given up to that great scourge of all the ages, Time. In our fight with him he hurls the years at us, and our houses crumble, our cities fall into ruin, and our civilization passes away. All our learning, all our wealth, all our accomplishment cannot turn him even so much as a minute from his path. And all we have with which to oppose him are dreams. Only against them is Time powerless.

The world is very tired of thinking, especially about itself, and we who are each a part of the

world are all tired too. We have thought so much lately. There seems to be hardly a human problem left untouched, and uninvestigated, and there seems to be hardly a human problem solved. Perhaps we have thought too much and dreamed too little. We have passed from the drama of the boudoir to that of the laboratory and the dissecting room; it may well be that the time has come when these things shall leave us, when we shall pass from the drama of the moment to the drama of all time, and from the destruction of little things to the preservation of great things.

It seems to me that there must be no one who can see the plays of Lord Dunsany or read them without feeling an immense sense of relief as at the release of some intolerable burden. His plays and tales are told to us as very few could have told them for more than many years. He is one of the great figures in a great literary movement, — in some ways he is the greatest figure, — and whatever Time may do to blot from the memory of man that which has passed, I think that the work of Dunsany will remain for always. For he has dreamed, and dreams are imperishable.

He has shown us beauty, which is truth, and truth is immortal. And so, while Lord Dunsany will in due course come to "pass away at his residence", it is quite as certain that he will never die.

IV

Letters

The following letters are taken from a correspondence between Mr. Stuart Walker, who has staged three of the Dunsany plays in his Portmanteau Theater, and Lord Dunsany. The letters throw light on not a little connected with the plays, in acting, staging, and in the philosophy underlying them. Lord Dunsany's letters are given verbatim, and those of Mr. Walker have been relieved only of such matter as did not seem to have a direct bearing on the subject at hand. The letters speak for themselves, and require no further introduction or comment.

Excerpts from a letter from Lord Dunsany to Mrs. Emma Garrett Boyd

Not dated.

. . . . There are many others who know me and know my work, and a great many that know me and never heard of my work, and many others to whom my work is a harmless eccentricity or a chance occupation less important than golf.

. . . . I was wounded less than three weeks ago. The bullet has been extracted and I am healing up rapidly. I am also under orders for France as soon as I have recovered.

. . . . Sometimes I think that no man is taken hence until he has done the work that he is here to do, and, looking back on five battles and other escapes from death, this theory seems only plausible; but how can one hold it when one thinks of the deaths of Shelley and Keats!

But in case I shall not be able to explain my work, I think the first thing to tell them is that it does not need explanation. One does not explain a sunset nor does one need to explain a work of art. One may analyse, of course; that is profitable and interesting, but the growing demand to be told What It's All About before one can even enjoy, is becoming absurd.

Don't let them hunt for allegories. I may have written an allegory at some time, but if I have, it was a quite obvious one, and as a general rule, I have nothing to do with allegories.

What is an allegory? A man wants the streets to be better swept in his town, or he wants his neighbors to have rather cleaner morals. He can't say so straight out, because he might be had up for libel, so he says what he has to say, but he says it about some extinct king in Babylon, but he's thinking of his one horse town all the time. Now when I write of Babylon, there are people who can

not see that I write of it for love of Babylon's ways, and they think I'm thinking of London still and our beastly Parliament.

Only I get further east than Babylon, even to Kingdoms that seem to lie in the twilight beyond the East of the World. I want to write about men and women and the great forces that have been with them from their cradle up — forces that the centuries have neither aged nor weakened. Not about people who are so interested about the latest mascot or motor that not enough remains when the trivial is sifted from them.

I will say first that in my plays I tell very simple stories, — so simple that sometimes people of this complex age, being brought up in intricacies, even fail to understand them. Secondly, no man ever wrote a simple story yet, because he is bound to color it with his own experience. Take my "Gods of the Mountain." Some beggars, being hard up, pretend to be gods. Then they get all that they want. But Destiny, Nemesis, the Gods, punish them by turning them into the very idols they desire to be.

First of all you have a simple tale told dramatically, and along that you have hung, without any deliberate intention of mine — so far as I know — a truth, not true to London only or to New York or to one municipal party but to the experience of man. That is the kind of way that man does get hit by destiny. But mind you, that is all uncon-

scious, though inevitable. I am not trying to teach anybody anything. I merely set out to make a work of art out of a simple theme, and God knows we want works of art in this age of corrugated iron. How many people hold the error that Shakespeare was of the school room! Whereas he was of the playground, as all artists are.

Dunsany.

Stuart Walker to Lady Dunsany

June 6, 1916.

My dear Lady Dunsany:

A cable from Miss Wollersen two days ago had informed me of Lord Dunsany's misfortune. I trust that he is fairly on the road to complete recovery; it seems a great tragedy that one with universal messages should be silenced by rebellions and wars.

I have read "The Tents of the Arabs." It is beautifully poetic but its lack of action makes it unavailable for me now. I have several plays of the type in preparation and I have to be careful not to attempt too many wherein the only movement is of the mind and spirit. But should the play still be free at the end of next season I should like to consider it again.

Before closing my letter I want to tell you that the costume plates for "The Golden Doom" are very promising. Mr. Frank Zimmerer, the artist,

is a most capable young man and he uses Lord Dunsany's green with great effectiveness. I call it the Dunsany Green. How else could I designate it? — the Green gods, Klesh, the green sword in "King Argimenes", the green lantern outside Skarui's door!

With every good wish for Lord Dunsany's complete and rapid recovery,

Stuart Walker.

Lord Dunsany to Stuart Walker

June 28, 1916.

Dear Mr. Walker:

I am still in Ireland as I am still recovering from my wound, though I am very nearly ready to go now. Had I not been wounded I should now be in the trenches. So I am answering your letter to Lady Dunsany. Hughes Massie, I am glad to hear, are arranging for you to have "The Gods of the Mountain." . . . . Whenever I may be abroad or dead, Lady Dunsany will make all arrangements. "Argimenes" was the first play I ever wrote about my own country. "The Glittering Gate" I had already written, chiefly to please Yeats, but that play never interested me. "Argimenes" was the first play laid in the native land of my spirit, and of course it has a first play's imperfections, the most visible of which is I fear a downward trend from a fine scene of the King and his bone to a mere round-

ing off and ceasing, instead of rising the whole way like "The Gods of the Mountain." Indeed I think I wrote the whole play from a sudden fancy I had of a king in rags gnawing a bone, but that fancy may have come from an inner memory of a time when I too was hungry, sitting and sleeping upon the ground with other dishevelled men in Africa.

The last stage direction in this play (*in a voice of protest*) was suggested to me by a producer and pleased me at the time but I almost think my own idea was better. I made Zarb say "Majesty" in awe. That he should throw away good bones reveals to Zarb, as nothing else has done, the pinnacle to which Argimenes has really risen. The other way is funny, but I think I ought to have stuck to my own inspiration. I amuse myself sometimes by cutting seals on silver and on the chance that it may amuse you if it arrives unbroken I will put one of them or more on this envelope.

Though the world may be growing more barbarous in Flanders, what you tell me of your aspirations shows that elsewhere it is becoming more civilized. As a matter of fact it is not the ruins of Ypres or a street in Dublin that shows the high water mark of our times' barbarity; it is to be seen in London in our "musical" "comedies", in much of our architecture, and in toys made for children.

Yours sincerely,

Dunsany.

Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

Agmar tells the one who doubts to go

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

July 12, 1916.

My dear Lord Dunsany:

When my mail was brought to me this morning the first thing that caught my eye was a light green seal which represented a god of the mountain. Before I turned to the face of the envelope I called my mother and my cousin to tell them that I need search no further for the design for the costumes. Then one of them asked who made the seals. The moment I turned the envelope I recognized your writing, which I had seen in the manuscript of "The Queen's Enemies."

Your letter pleased me very much, but shortly after I had read it, I heard that the rights to "A Night at an Inn" had gone definitely to Mr. Harrison Gray Fiske. Of course I was deeply disappointed for the addition of this play to my repertory would have meant a great deal to me. Mr. Fiske is much older in the theatre than I am, but I am hoping to make you very proud of my work on your other plays. I cabled to you to-day about "Argimenes" with more assurance than I have had for some time. Your suggestion that Zarb's final "Majesty" is spoken in awe shows me that I shall be able to stage your work as you would like it. I have always, in reading the play aloud, read the word in awe. The direction "in a voice of protest" was, frankly, a shock to me because it changed Zarb and weakened

the remarkable climax of the play, which by the way, I think builds very well in interest with sure dramatic strides — not as inevitably as "The Gods of the Mountain", but beautifully, nevertheless.

I am going to tell you a few of my ideas about play-producing because I feel at ease after reading your statements about our uncivilized musical comedies and our absurd toys for children. To my mind the play is the most important consideration. The author must know what he is talking about and why he says what he does in the way he says it. There is a story to tell and I try to tell it in the author's way. I don't like symbolism as such, and I make no effort to foist upon an audience a suggestion that there is always some deep hidden meaning. There is a story to tell and that story must always have a certain effect upon the audience, and that effect is gained primarily through the actor's ability to translate the author's meaning into mental and physical action. The scenery must never be obtrusive; it is not and cannot be an end in itself; but to me lights come next to the actor in importance. With lights of various color and intensity, vast changes in space, and time, and thought can be suggested. My lighting system is very remarkable. Oh, how I wish you might see the beggars turn to stone.

I know your feeling for your first beloved play "King Argimenes" and I shall treat it with a fine affection. It seems almost wicked to discuss terms

about beautiful things, about poetry; but I want you to know I am eager to help your name to its rightful place in America, and to try to see that your business treatment is just. I think "King Argimenes" will be especially successful in the spring and summer and in California when we play in the open air.

Stuart Walker.

Lord Dunsany to Stuart Walker

Brae Head House, Londonderry

July 14, 1916.

Dear Mr. Walker:

I've just cabled accepting the terms of your cable received this morning. I hope you will like the play and that you will find it a success. You will probably not have the difficulties that I found in Dublin when "Argimenes" was acted. I found that the actors "off" who had the rather impressive chant of "Illuriel is fallen" to do, not being in sight of the audience would never trouble to do it accurately. There are two such chants, a mournful one and a joyous one, and they used to mix them up a good deal.

But then they used not to rehearse properly there.

I wish that print could convey the tone of voice in which things should be said, but it can't.

Yours sincerely,

Dunsany.

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

July 17, 1916.

My dear Lord Dunsany:

The possession of "The Gods of the Mountain" and "The Golden Doom" makes me very happy. Now I am waiting word on "King Argimenes" with great hopes. It is a big play, but I am not expecting any such popular success for it, or for "The Golden Doom", as "A Night at an Inn" will have or "The Gods of the Mountain" ought to have.

The loss of "A Night at an Inn" was a great disappointment to me. I saw it the first night at the Neighborhood Playhouse and I told the Misses Lewisohn then that I would do anything to get it. In my eagerness to get in touch with you I am afraid that I hurt or displeased them: but the process of reaching you seemed so terribly slow. I had already told them that I should defer to them even if I succeeded in reaching you first and that if I got the play I should let them use it at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Mr. Fiske ought to make a great popular success of his production. The play is quite the best short melodrama I have ever seen, but to my heart and mind, "The Golden Doom", "The Gods of the Mountain", and "King Argimenes" are far greater plays. "The Queen's Enemies" is most interesting, but its mechanical requirements are difficult of achievement for the present. "The

Tents of the Arabs" impressed me very much. I hope that I may try it sometimes when my resources are greater.

With every good wish,

Stuart Walker.

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

July 24.

My dear Lord Dunsany:

Mr. Zimmerer brought the scene designs for both "The Golden Doom" and "The Gods of the Mountain" last night, and I set them up in the model of my theatre to test them under the lights. "The Golden Doom" is really a remarkable setting. There are the great iron doors in the centre at the back of the stage. At each side of the doorway is a tall green column, with a black basalt base three feet high, standing on a basalt circle in a gray flooring. Hanging between the columns just below the flies is a large winged device in dark blue with a touch of orange here and there. Extending from the gates diagonally to the sides of the proscenium are very high black marble walls with a narrow dull-colored enameled brick "baseboard." The only vivid colorings on the stage except the costumes are the green columns and an orange design on the iron doors. As in the winged device, Mr. Zimmerer has followed Assyrian and Babylonian designs closely in the cut and color of the costumes.

As the Portmanteau Theatre main stage is rather small, and the forestage is much used for the action of the plays, there were some difficult problems in the settings of "The Gods of the Mountain." In the first act Mr. Zimmerer uses a small section of the wall between two bastions. It is built rather fantastically of colored rocks, and above it one can see the copper domes of Kongros, and in the distance the emerald peak of Marma. This last detail is interesting but I am not yet sure that it is best to have the mountain seen far beyond the city in the first act because I want to get an effect in the second and third acts. The Metropolitan Hall of Kongros is quite simple. The principal detail is a broad lunette-shaped window through which Marma is visible and it is with the play of lights upon Marma that I want to gain some impressive effects. In the costumes as in the wall of the first act Mr. Zimmerer uses oriental themes with no attempt at accuracy.

Kongros was in its heyday we believe some time after the fall of Illuriel and as we place it, it stood somewhere west of the Hills of Ting, but not so far southwest as ancient Ithara.

All our good wishes go to you, my dear Lord Dunsany.

S. W.

Photo by White Studio. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

Agmar tells Slag to have a prophecy made

Lord Dunsany to Stuart Walker

Londonderry, Ireland.

August 7, 1916.

My dear Mr. Walker:

Another welcome letter from you reminds me that I have not answered your last. I was waiting for a mood which should be worthy of the occasion, but I have had few moods but lazy ones ever since I was wounded.

I have always heard works of art spoken of as valueless or of value, usually the former, and on the rare occasions when they have been admitted to be of value I had found that they take their place with cheese. They are in fact a commodity or "article", and have a price, and are valued according to it. It is therefore a great delight to find that you look on a work of art as a work of art. I had almost forgotten that it was one. I am sorry about "A Night at an Inn." But as you say, it cannot touch the little "Golden Doom", while to compare "The Gods of the Mountain" to it would be like comparing a man to his own shadow. Talking of "The Golden Doom", there is one sentence in Björkman's preface which particularly delighted me and that is the one in which he says that I show a child's desire for a new toy and the fate of an empire as being of equal importance in the scheme of things. That is exactly what I intended, the unforeseen effect of the very little — not that I am trying to teach

anybody anything of course, I may mention white chalk while I am telling a story if I have happened to notice that chalk is white, but without any intention of thrusting a message into the ears, or a lesson on whiteness: people seem to have been so much frightened by the school-master when they were young that they think they see him in everyone ever after.

Often critics see in my plays things that I did not know were there. And that is as it should be, for instinct is swift and unconscious, while reason is plodding and slow, and comes up long afterward and explains things, but instinct does not stop for explanations. An artist's "message" is from instinct to sympathy. I try sometimes to explain genius to people who mistrust or hate it by telling them it is doing anything, as a fish swims or a swallow flies, perfectly, simply and with absolute ease. Genius is in fact an infinite capacity for *not* taking pains.

August 8.

It has just occurred to me that perhaps you never got my cable in answer to your letter about "Argimenes." I cabled "Right" meaning that I accepted your terms; but the Censor, who is wiser than I, found in this message a menace to the stability of the Realm, and an explanation of my invidious cable was demanded. This I supplied, and thought the cable had gone, but it may have been considered too dangerous in the end. What tended to annoy me

about this delay was, that even if my cable had been an invitation through you to Hindenburg to land an army corps on the Irish coast, I am one of the people who would have to assist to push it off again, and as my name, rank, and regiment had to be signed in the cable form this thought might have occurred to others. Perhaps you got my cable after all, though delayed, but in any case it's no use grumbling.

About "The Golden Doom." The Haymarket Theatre acquired the rights for five years in November, 1912, but in any country in which they neglected to perform it they lost the rights after three years, and they returned to me. This applies to the U. S. A.; the rights returned to me last winter, but in any case they do not belong to the printer or binder of "Five Plays." What is more important is that the larger the children are the more they might be apt to blur the point of the play which is, that though they are clearly seen, they are overlooked and ignored. If the girl child appeared say 14 the sentries would probably be looking at her, if she was 15 they would never take their eyes off her the whole time, if they were the kind of sentries I have met — and they probably were in Zericon at the time Babylon fell. The audience would probably feel this. But to go on talking about important matters like war to a soldier, while small children are playing in the dirt or sand, is humanly natural.

I thought I noticed this at the Haymarket, when they started with small children but altered the cast afterward and changed the size. But of course it is only a matter of illusion.

The "public" must needs know exactly "when it all happened" so I never neglect to inform them of the time. Since man does not alter it does not in the least matter what time I put, unless I am writing a play about his clothes or his motor car, so I put "about the time of the fall of Babylon", it seemed a nice breezy time, but "about the time of the invention of Carter's Pills" would of course do equally well. Well, the result was that they went to the British Museum and got the exact costumes of the period in Babylon, and it did very nicely. There are sure to have been people who said, "Now my children you shall come to the theatre and enjoy yourselves, *but at the same time* you shall learn what it was really like in Babylon." The fact is the schoolmaster has got loose, and he must be caged, so that people can enjoy themselves without being pounced on and made to lead better lives, like African natives being carried away by lions while they danced.

Military duties have somewhat interfered with the course of this letter and the taking of a wasps' nest to amuse some children that live near here, and my own small boy, may interfere with it further.

I meant when I got your last letter to write to you sometime and send you a few comments on "Argimenes", for print unfortunately cannot con-

vey the tone in which words are said, and often in the tone is the meaning. I have "Argimenes" by me now and probably shan't find much to say about it. First of all on page 63 (American edition). Zarb in his utterance of the word Majesty shows that he attaches more importance to the empty glory of being called *Majesty* than to the possession of a horse or any other advantage he enumerates. But after all this sort of detail is too trivial to be of any interest and you will have noticed already how Argimenes with his wider views and knowledge of strategy appears witless to Zarb when it comes to the detail of the daily life of a soldier of the slave guard. Probably if we were suddenly made to live amongst insects it would come out that we knew nothing about the smell of grass or even its exact color, and the insects would wonder how any creature living in the world could be so ignorant of a thing so common as grass.

Another little note. Page 75. An old slave — "Will Argimenes give *me* a sword?" He says it as one who sees a dream too glorious to be true.

Old Slave — "A *sword!*" He says it as one the dream of whose life has come true. "No, no, I must not." He says it as one who sees it was only a dream. But in the book this change between *sword* and *no* is not indicated. Of course I always liked to read my play aloud before it was acted to show the actors what my ideas were, which print often fails to do.

Aug. 9.

I have just received yours of July 19th this morning, and see by it that you never received the cable that I sent and for which I paid. Do not think badly of our Censor, but reflect that God for his own good reasons has given wisdom to some, while upon others for reasons as divinely wise he has showered stupidity. I have no redress.

Yours very sincerely,

Dunsany.

Lord Dunsany to Stuart Walker

Ebrington Barracks,
Londonderry,
Ireland.

My dear Mr. Walker, —

My last letter to you ended somewhat abruptly, my mind being too preoccupied with the stupidity of the Censor who seems to have stopped my cable to you in which I accepted your terms for my two act play on July 14th. I write to say how the pictures of the plays you have done delight me. You evidently have the spirit of Fairyland there.

August 13.

I am glad you like the seal of the god among the mountains. I cut seals on silver whenever leisure and an idea fall in the same hour, and this one is almost my favorite.

I was looking the other day at a photograph that Miss Lewisohn sent me of "A Night at an Inn" and I was much struck with the print of a spaniel with a duck in his mouth hanging on the wall; such a hackneyed homely touch as that must have made a splendid background for Klesh when he came in so faithfully following the stage directions, which are that "he was a long sight uglier than anything else in the world."

Let me hear how you are getting on with "Argimenes" and "The Golden Doom." I don't get many letters from America and as it seems to be the most fertile soil upon which my work has fallen I should be glad to hear oftener from there. I don't suppose my brother officers know that I write, and all European soils are so harrowed by war that nothing grows there but death.

August 15.

I have just received your letters dated July 24th and 26th.

I am glad to hear that you have after all received the cable I sent off on July 14th.

Mr. Zimmerer's designs sound magnificent. Your words 'with no attempt at accuracy' please me, they are like a window open in a heated schoolroom; for this age has become a schoolroom, and nasty, exact, little facts hem us round, leaving no room for wonder.

You have placed Kongros exactly; all maps agree with you; for though they do not actually mark it,

the tracks across the desert — taken in conjunction with the passage over the hills of Ting — and regarded in the light of all travellers' tales — can only point to one thing. It is there, as you have said that one will find Kongros. Yet one counsel and a warning the traveller should take to his heart, let him heap scorn upon himself in the Fate, let him speak meanly of himself and villify his origin, for they tell a fable to-day, even in Kongros (the old men tell it seated in the dust) of how there once came folk to Kongros City that made themselves out to be greater than men may be. What happened to them who can say? For it was long ago. Without doubt the green gods seated in the city are the true gods, worn by time though they be; and above all let the traveller abase himself before the beggars there, and humble himself before them; for who may say what they are or whence they come?

Regarding "The Golden Doom", a critic said in London that it was death to touch the iron door and yet a lot of people touched it. There might be something in that but not much I think. The children of course are ignored — the play hinges on that — and after all someone must open the door for the King, and his retinue accompanies him, but better not let any unauthorized person touch it unnecessarily, for it would be a pity to kill a good actor just for the sake of realism.

Even as I went out of my quarters, five minutes ago, after writing this, I saw eight squads drilling

on the parade ground and two children right in the middle trying to dig with sticks and no one saying a word to them, so I know that my "Golden Doom" is true to life. But after all it is easy to be true to life when one writes of man and the dreams of man, and not of some particular set of fashions in dress or catchwords that may be regarded as being untrue to all time.

Yours very sincerely,

Dunsany.

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

October 2, 1916.

My dear Lord Dunsany:

Your letters of mid-August were forwarded to me at Wyoming. They had been despoiled of their seals but no black pencil or heedless shears had laid the contents waste. I have a very serious quarrel, because I am quite sure one of my letters and several bits of printed matter never reached you. Many months ago I sent my message to you whose work has said so much to me, and I told you then what I thought of "The Golden Doom" and what I hoped for "The Gods of the Mountain", and "King Argimenes." America did not know you so well then. Now I take pride in telling you that even the salesmen in the bookshops know your name, the names of your books — even those reported out of print — and have their individual way of pronouncing everything. Many of them have friends

who know you, and these friends come back like travellers past Marma with their wonder tales and pronunciations. You are variously called *Dun' sany, Doon sah ny, Dun sa ny, Dun san y,* author of *Ar gim i nez, Ar gi mee neez, Argi me nez,* I myself have chosen the pronunciation of Argimenes — the *ar* as in are, the *gi* as in give, *s* as z — There! the eternal pedogogue is showing beneath my youth, I fear; but I call Argimenes what I do call him because I think he would like it, even though *he* had another way.

We had our public dress rehearsals of "The Golden Doom" and "The Gods of the Mountain" at Wyoming. And here is where I should like to tell you what these curtains opening on the realization of my dream meant to me; but I cannot. I have not your words to picture intangible things. I can tell you only that I was very happy to see in my own little theatre what I know to be a great work. "The Golden Doom" was remarkable and its effect upon the audience was indescribable. The scene you know. Under the lights it was impressive. But now that you have told me what you think of school-rooms may I confess that Mr. Zimmerer did use Assyrian and Babylonian designs but with less attempt at accuracy than I led you to believe. The Sentries were very good. I had already made them very human sentries before your letter came, not because I have known raw man through time and space, as you have, but because I have known him from the

Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes and from a Louisiana hamlet to New York. The children are *young*. They are played without strain by charming people who give the illusion of innocence and wonder. The King and his Chamberlain are impressive and the Prophets with their cloaks are joys. When they make the sign to the stars — laying the backs of their right hands horizontally against their foreheads they disclose a great flat jewel in the palm of the hand. The spies, who are usually played as jumping jacks, are very skillfully played in all seriousness. Comedy is so near the surface of life that it can find its way without the forcing tried by most directors. And "The Golden Doom" is life to me. I introduce music twice. When the King orders a sacrifice to be made, an attendant bears the order to the nearest temple and presently a stringed instrument strangely played (a bronze gong and a tom-tom mark the rhythm) is heard. After the order is rescinded the musician plucks a dirge faintly, for have the priests not donned their black cloaks? The audience was deeply impressed. But I have always known it was a great play.

I cannot write so surely of "The Gods of the Mountain" because I am playing Agmar and my judgment is that of the actor who feels the audience during the play and hears the verdict afterward. Evidently however the audience understood you. They laughed at the right time, and what is better

still, they shuddered at the right time and cheered when the final curtains closed. I have taken two liberties in the first act. Will you send your approval quickly? The curtains open after a moment of music that tells of the East. The mottled wall, the copper domes of Kongros, and green Marma piercing the sky in the distance, are visible in the bright sunlight. Ulf, penurious and suspicious, Oogno, the gluttonous and care free, and Thahn, the inefficient and wheezy, are seated under the wall. An old water bearer passes by, then a dromedary man. A moment later a fat woman singing a song which the successful beggars imitate goes into the city but offers no alms. A snake-charmer passes — oh, but her dress is a marvel of white and orange and red — she drops one of her snakes into fat Oogno's bowl. Agmar followed by his one eyed retainer enters; Agmar in purple rags, and the other in black that has been fastened together at strategical points by pink which he must have stolen in Ackara. I have Mlan brought on the first act. He is little, inefficient, young, and speechless, but he makes the seventh beggar. The end of the first act shows the seven beggars. They put the green raiment underneath their rags. Agmar lines them up, looks them over, shows them the attitude of the gods once more and takes his place at the head of the column. The curtains close as the beggars disappear into the city. . . . Of course I have not added any lines, but the business holds very well.

In the second act I have made the character whose child is bitten by a death adder a mother. I think the scene gains in pathos and prepares somewhat more effectively for the third act which is tremendous. I have had the thrones made so that they are palpably imitation and this seems to add to the impressiveness of the final picture, when the fearful citizens have slunk away leaving the seven stone beggars to themselves: in the distance green Marma pierces a blue night sky. . . . Mr. Arthur Farwell, one of our best American composers, has done the music for "The Gods of the Mountain" and his grasp of your story is excellent.

We have not yet put "King Argimenes" into the scene, but it is going very well in rehearsal. Mr. Harry Gilbert is writing the music for this, and the tear song and the wine song are promising. I think in fact that you would be highly pleased with what we are doing.

Our season opens Oct. 23rd at Springfield, Massachusetts, and for five weeks we play in the East in the larger cities — on November 27th we open in New York at the 39th Street Theatre which is really well arranged for your performances. Our opening bill will in all likelihood consist of "The Golden Doom", "Nevertheless", "The Flame Man", and my own "Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil." On Thursday and Saturday mornings of the first week we shall play for children — and what an audience they will make! I use a prologue for some of

my own plays and with your permission I am going to make him speak some of your lines before "The Golden Doom." Of course I shall submit the lines to you for approval. I want to open the performance in New York with a prologue to the Theatre, a copy of which I enclose. Then the Prologue of the plays will speak a few words: if no news spreader were listening I should call them *mood* words. These prologues were liked last season very much. Such lines as your "Come with me, ladies and gentlemen who are in any wise weary of London (may I substitute *the City* for London?) come with me: and those that tire at all of the world we know; for we have new worlds here."

Haven't you some new plays that I can see?

With every good wish —

Stuart Walker.

Lord Dunsany to Stuart Walker

Ebrington Barracks,
Londonderry, Ireland.
Oct. 26.

My dear Mr. Walker:

I have looked forward for a long time to hearing from you again and was delighted this morning to find your letter of Oct. 2. It is delightful to find somebody just going ahead with my play without asking if it is What The Public Wants (as though the Public had irrevocably decided just what it wants

forever), if the audience will understand it, — and generally muddling round.

Well, to answer your letter bit by bit, first of all the one way that nobody should pronounce my name is the way people do who call it *Dun' sa ny,* for pretty as the dactyl is it is not a dactyl. Those who call it *Doon-sahny* have every right to do so, for since it is the name of an Irish place one can hardly blame people for pronouncing it in an old Irish unanglicized manner. I don't know about the *Sahny,* but *Doon* is I believe a quite correct pronunciation of those circular things which in Ireland are usually spelt dun and which appear in London as don, from one of which my name evidently had its name. But as a matter of fact I pronounce it *Dun sa' ny,* with the accent on the second syllable which is pronounced as *say,* the first syllable rhyming with gun. To come to a much more important matter you are right about *Argi meen eez,* the principle accent falling on the 3rd syllable, the *g* is hard, the *gi* as in give, and the whole arrangement of the word as in Artaxerxes.

The Censor will wonder who Argimenes (to spell him correctly) is, and why the hell it should matter how my name is pronounced in America.

No, it is impossible to substitute "the city" for "London" in my preface to "The Book of Wonder." It would upset the rhythm and make a sentence that I could never have written. Say "who are in any wise weary of *cities*" and you will be all

right. Use the phrase as much as you like. Wall Street, if applicable, would sound splendid.

What you tell me of the way you are doing my plays makes me feel sure they will succeed, not only because of the way you are doing them, but because your letter makes me confident that their fortunes can safely be intrusted to you.

I wish I could read each play to you once, for neither pen nor typist can say exactly where the stress is to fall, in spite of them the rhythm can be missed, and even in some cases they may not show clearly with what motive little words are said, while some appear to have significance where none is intended.

I wonder how the sentry will say "I would that I were swimming down the Gyshon, on the cool side, under the fruit trees." Sometimes my love of poetry overcomes the dramatist in me, and here and there are lines that I would like to hear said merely lyrically. If it be not blasphemous to mention his name while speaking of my own work I would say that Shakespeare had this fault: you read some such direction as, enter Two Murderers, and then you read some pure ecstacy of verse as the ruffians come on talking perhaps about dawn in fairyland.

I should like the sentry who has that line of mine to say the words "on the cool side, under the fruit trees" just as the last part of a hexameter. After all the — poets are right, there is a meaning in

rhythm though it lie too deep and is too subtle for us to reason out, or perhaps it lies like joy clear all over the surface of the world, and so is missed by our logic that goes burrowing blind like the mole, over whose head the buttercups blow unseen: that is the right explanation, not my first; nothing lies too deep that is essential to life, or who would live?

I turn to your letter again. A gong and a tom-tom are a lovely idea, and a flat jewel in the palm of the hand! Of course that is just the place where people would wear large flat jewels who had never known manual labor and whose only business was to bless. You say I know the scenes; but I wish I did. I never saw a design of it although you described it to me.

So you are Agmar. That is good.

The water-bearer and the snake-charmer and all will be great additions. Instead of citizens, etc. at the foot of the programme you might write "One who sells water, A charmer of snakes", and so on. Instantly the audience will know that they are before the gates of a country where water has its price, and the charming of snakes is an occupation.

Do what you like with Ulf. To me he appeared a man who in the course of his years had learned something of what is due to the gods: it is he, and he alone, that hints at Nemesis, and at the last he openly proclaims it — "(my fear) shall go from me crying like a dog from out a doomed city."

A play writes itself out of one's experience of life, going back further even than one can remember, and even, I think, into inherited memories. Our slow perceptions and toilsome reasoning can never keep pace with any work of art, and if I could tell you for certain the exact source and message of "The Gods of the Mountain" I could tell you from what storms and out of what countries come every drop of the spring that is laughing out of the hill.

Therefore I only suggest that Ulf plays as it were the part of a train bearer to the shadow of some messenger from the gods.

Oct. 26.

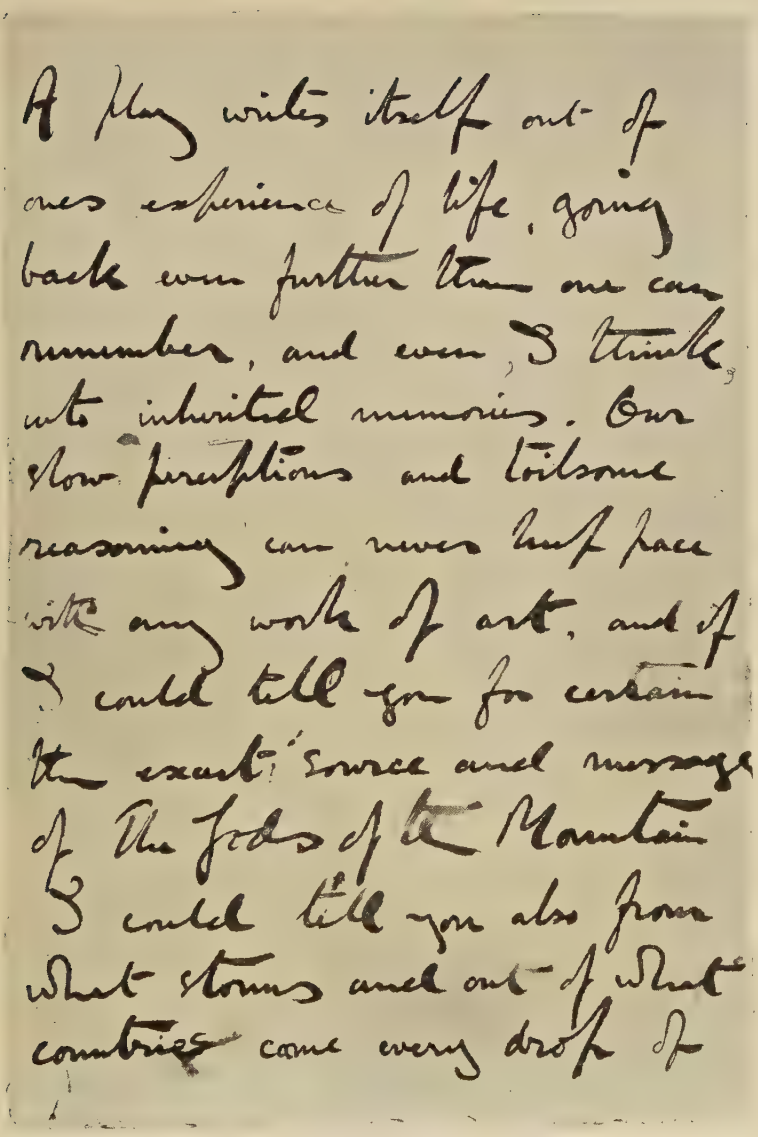
This letter has been lying about for some time so I had better send it off though your letter is but half answered.

Do send me photographs or designs of scenes, as many as you can, and Lady Dunsany would very much like to have the music for the piano. Thus I shall be able to hear it, or at least an echo of it; she would also very much like to see the photographs.

I do not expect to go to the front before the middle of December.

I wish you the best of luck with your own plays and for your venture with mine. You are one of the prophets of my gods. In all history I know of no tale of a god without any prophet; that would be too sad even for history. May my gods protect you from the following, who stoned the prophets

A play writes itself out of
ones experience of life, going
back even further than one can
remember, and even, I think,
into inherited memories. Our
slow perceptions and toilsome
reasoning can never keep pace
with any work of art, and if
I could tell you for certain
the exact source and message
of The Gods of the Mountain
I could tell you also from
what storms and out of what
countries came every drop of



A Page of a Letter from Lord Dunsany

so often of old time and stone them still — they sweat and pant, for they have stoned for so many centuries, their hands are cut by the lifting of many flints, still they stone on, lest ever the prophets should live, they deem it a holy duty: —

Ignorance
Apathy
Empty Frivolity
Fashion

and many another begotten by the third upon the fourth. And so farewell.

Dunsany.

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

November 5, 1916.

My dear Lord Dunsany:

My intention was to write you immediately after the first performance of "The Golden Doom" and "The Gods of the Mountain" but when I tell you that we have played 65 plays in 12 cities during the past two weeks you may understand my delay.

"The Golden Doom" was first performed on Tuesday Oct. 24th in Hartford Conn. and we have given five performances of it in the two weeks. It has made a very deep impression both with newspaper men and the public at large. When I have a moment to sit down and sort out my papers I shall send you some clippings. In one you will notice that the

writer appreciates the youngness of the children. I do not generally approve of having a girl play a boy's part, but Miss Rogers creates a most happy illusion, and this saves me from using my very remarkable Gregory Kelly in the part. He is somewhat too tall. I am more in love with your beautiful play than ever and it is to be used in the opening bill in New York City on Nov. 27th. Unfortunately, there are no photographs yet, because we have been moving about so feverishly and rapidly, that we cannot take time to set up a play especially for the photographer.

"The Gods of the Mountain" had its first performance at Mount Holyoke, *and it is a great play.* I shall send you photographs of myself as Agmar, and Mr. Kelly as Slag and several of the beggars. In playing Agmar, I have made him a man who would have been a great man if he had just been one step further advanced in understanding. Several of my friends have disagreed with me in not making him a physically powerful man. I am quite tall, being six feet and quite slender, and as you will see from the costume, I accentuate both the height and the slenderness of the man, and there are moments when I allow him to develop a real light in his eye, that is, the light that could shine through the ages if it were allowed to shine.

I am quite gratified that every notice has spoken of the final effect in the play when the seven beggars have turned to green stone and in the distance green

Marma cleaves a deep blue sky. Enthusiasm at the end of this scene has been uniformly gratifying.

"King Argimenes" is to have its first performance next Friday November the 10th in Pittsburg.

On account of the small size of the Portmanteau stage I have had a very difficult problem in the first act of suggesting great space, and finally succeeded in obtaining the desired effect I think. Instead of using your suggestion — the flat Darniak Slave Fields — I have used the side of a hill which Darniac mentions in the second act. All that the audience sees is the grass covered slope of the hill and into this has been cut a deep impressive trench, and in this trench are Argimenes and Zarb. The whole act is dull in color and depressive. In the second act, however, Mr. Zimmerer indulged himself in the most vivid colorings that we have on the Portmanteau stage. The entire stage is draped in black curtains. On a black dais is placed the Throne of Darniak. This throne seat is built out of elephant tusks. The back ones are seven feet high curving high over Darniak's head, and the ivory is inlaid in places with vermilion and blue jewels. The seat of the throne is a vermilion cushion and immediately back of the throne is a great green circle, and running down the steps is a broad green crape which is laid on a black floor. To the right sits Illuriel. He is a marvelous creation in ivory, gold and vermilion, and he sits with oriental calmness on an agate column. On the other side of the throne stands an hour glass through which vermilion

sand is slowly running, and this stands on top of a gold globe which in turn rests upon a vermilion standard. Darniak himself wears a black robe and seated on the steps at his feet is dark haired Atharlia in orange and red. The blonde Oxara is in lavender and white and silver. The feline Cahafra is in light blue and white and her hair is red. The tragic Thragolind is in gray and blue. I think you would like the Queens.

Just one more suggestion about "The Gods of the Mountain." In the third act I have had the thrones built so that they are palpably imitative. Am I right in doing this? The altar in the second act is a great block of agate standing on ivory legs. It is really a wonderful piece of stage furniture.

Very truly yours,

Stuart Walker.

Stuart Walker to Lord Dunsany

December 24, 1916.

My dear Lord Dunsany :

First let me thank you for the photograph which your uncle delivered to me. It is the pleasantest sort of assurance that the strange man shown in the article in the Boston Transcript was not you.

Our season in New York has proved more successful than I had hoped and we are now advertising our sixth week. It is unfortunate that we cannot stay longer because just the people to whom we want to appeal are finding us and sending their friends to

Photo by J. M. Cummings. Courtesy of Portmanteau Theater

KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

Argimenes at last mounts the throne of Darniak

see us. This resulted in good houses last week which is notoriously the worst week in the theatrical year. "King Argimenes" made a deep impression and so with "Gammer Gurton" and my own anonymous dramatization of "The Birthday of the Infanta" it will remain in the bill all the week. The critics have for once united in praise of my theatre and in the color and form of "King Argimenes" they forgot to say that the theatre is small.

"The Gods of the Mountain" has probably had its last performance here for this season because I think I see my way clear to produce it on a large scale next season. We have already played it in New York 16 times — a very fine record for a repertory company. We have played "The Golden Doom" 11 times. Of course when we return next season we shall repeat them. They are plays that I want to keep in my repertory for years and years to come, for despite the statement of the Sun critic that they are little plays, and the Mail man that you do not care much about the theatre or what becomes of your plays — he says you dabble in them as amateur poets dabble with the magazines — I am inclined to the certainty that your three plays will live as long as I live in the theatre, and ages beyond that.

"King Argimenes" strangely enough builds beautifully from the scene between Argimenes and Zarb to the finale of the second act when Argimenes decked in a robe of cloth of gold, mounts to the step of the throne and turns majestically before the ivory throne

to order the burial of the late king. There has never been a suggestion of loss of tension in the second act. Not even during the scene of the queens and the prophet does the audience forget the crouching Argimenes who stole from the dark trench in the preceding act to kill the guard. After the queens leave the stage in the second act, I have the scene darkened to suggest a lapse of time. Then in a half light broken now and then by a gleam of torches, the rest of the play is done. When Darniak rushes in from the chamber of banquets to see Illuriel cast down I have the queens follow him and it is their voices that first take up the wail "Illuriel is fallen." Besides their long-robed figures stealing in terror from the throne room are much more impressive than men's figures would be in the half light.

Both Mr. Zimmerer and Mr. Farwell are very slow with their work for you. If I were to send you the score of the music as it is written for the harp, violin, and cello, I wonder if Lady Dunsany could use it? The photographs will suggest the scenes to you, but I am eager to have you see the color. I wish I could bring my whole model to you. Perhaps I shall be able to do so some day within the days of my youth. With every good wish for the New Year and new years,

Stuart Walker.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

The casts given in the following pages are those of the first British and American productions. All the British productions were professional, but in America the Neighborhood Playhouse productions, and that of the Arts and Crafts Theater must be classed technically as amateur. From an artistic standpoint, however, they were entirely professional, especially the latter. This is a small point, but one worthy of attention, as Dunsany's work has become widely known in this country partially through the medium of the amateur stage. I have given the most notable of the amateur productions, and those only when there has been no professional production. Two productions of "The Gods of the Mountain" are mentioned for America, because the first was so entire a failure that most people have never even heard of it. There have been many other amateur productions of these plays to which attention has been called from time to time, but it is neither possible nor in the slightest degree necessary that they be listed.

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Productions

The Glittering Gate

Produced under the direction of Mr. Norryes Connell, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on April 29th, 1909, with the following cast:

Jim	*Mr. Fred O'Donovan*
Bill	*Mr. Norryes Connell*

When the production of the Abbey Theatre was carried to the Court Theatre, London, the part of *Bill* was acted by Mr. J. M. Kerrigan, who also played it at Manchester, when the company was on tour.

The first American production was made at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York City, on March 6th, 1915. The scenery was designed by Mr. Warren Dahler and Miss Lois Phipps. The cast was:

Jim	*Mr. David Solomon*
Bill	*Mr. Max M. Kaplan*

King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior

Produced under the direction of Mr. Nugent Monck, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on January 26th, 1911, with the following cast:

King Argimenes . . .	*Mr. Fred O'Donovan*
Zarb	*Mr. J. M. Kerrigan*
The King's Overseer .	*Mr. Ambrose Power*
An Old Slave . . .	*Mr. Fred Harford*
A Young Slave . . .	*Mr. Brinsley MacNamara*
A Prophet	*Mr. J. A. O'Rourke*
King Darniak . . .	*Mr. Arthur Sinclair*
The Idol Guard . . .	*Mr. Sydney J. Morgan*
The Servant of the King's Dog	*Mr. Eric Gorman*
Queen Oxara	*Miss Maeve O'Donnell*
Queen Atharlia . . .	*Miss Sara Allgood*
Queen Cahafra . . .	*Miss Maire O'Neill*
Queen Thragolind . .	*Miss Maire Nic Shiubhlaig*

The scenes and the costumes for this production were designed by Mr. Nugent Monck.

The first production in America was made by Mr. Stuart Walker in his Portmanteau Theater, in New York City, on December 18th, 1916, with scenery and costumes designed by Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer, and with the following cast:

King Argimenes	*Mr. McKay Morris*
Zarb	*Mr. Gregory Kelly*
The King's Overseer . .	*Mr. Lew Medbury*
An Old Slave	*Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer*
A Young Slave	*Mr. Robert Cook*
A Prophet	*Mr. Edgar Stehli*
King Darniak	*Mr. Willard Webster*
The Idol Guard	*Mr. Ward Thornton*
The Servant of the King's Dog	*Miss Agnes Rogers*
Queen Oxara	*Miss Florence Wollersen*
Queen Arthalia	*Miss Gertrude Davis*
Queen Cahafra	*Miss Nancy Winston*
Queen Thragolind . . .	*Miss Judith Lowry*

The Gods of the Mountain

First produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on June 1st, 1911, with the following cast:

Oogno	. . . . .	*Mr. E. A. Warburton*
Thahn	. . . . .	*Mr. Claude Rains*
Ulf	. . . . .	*Mr. H. R. Hignett*
Agmar	*Beggars* . .	*Mr. Charles V. France*
Slag	. . . . .	*Mr. Charles Maude*
A Thief	. . . . .	*Mr. Lawrence Hanray*
Mlan	. . . . .	*Mr. R. P. Lamb*

Oorander	*Mr. J. Dickson Kenwin*
Akmos	*Mr. Ernest Graham*
Illanaum	*Mr. Grindon Bentley*
Bashara	*Mr. F. G. Clifton*
Thulek	*Mr. G. Carr*
Thoharmas	*Mr. Kenneth Dennys*
Haz	*Mr. B. Hatton Sinclair*
Theedes	*Mr. A. Jones*
Lirra	*Miss Anne Carew*
Eselunza	*Miss E. Risdon*
Thonion Alara	*Miss V. Whitaker*
Ylax	*Miss M. Ronsard*
Ackarnees	*Mr. Norman Page*
A Dromedary Man	*Mr. W. Black*
Nennek of the Meadows	*Miss Enid Rose*
The Others	*Mr. E. Lyall Swete*
	Mr. A. Ackerman
	Mr. K. Black
	Mr. H. Cooper
	Mr. E. Leverett
	Mr. G. Wilkinson
	Mr. J. O'Brien

Citizens

The scenery was designed and painted by Mr. Walter Bayes, with the exception of the first set, for which designs were made by Mr. S. H. Sime.

The first American production was made by Mr. W. A. Brady, in the Teck Theater in Buffalo, New York, on April 8th, 1912, with the following cast. With the exception of the cast the production was identical with the one at the Haymarket.

OOGNO	. . .	*Mr. George Schaeffer*
THAHN	. . .	*Mr. Worthington Romaine*
ULF	. . .	*Mr. William McVay*
AGMAR	*Beggars*	*Mr. Cyril Scott*
SLAG	. . .	*Mr. M. T. McQuarrie*
A THIEF	. . .	*Mr. W. J. Gros*
MLAN	. . .	*Mr. Sage Bennett*
OORABDER	. . .	*Mr. Edwin Cushman*
AKMOS	. . .	*Mr. Harry Cowley*
ILLANAUM	. . .	*Mr. Dallas Anderson*
BASHARA	. . .	*Mr. William Levis*
THEELEK	. . .	*Mr. Arthur Bentley*
THOHARMAS	*Citizens*	*Mr. Louis Meers*
HAZ	. . .	*Mr. William Henderson*
THEEDES	. . .	*Mr. James Hogan*
LIRRA	. . .	*Miss Mabelle Maybourne*
ESELUNZA	. . .	*Miss Susan Daniels*
THONION ALARA	. . .	*Miss Frances Savage*
YLAX	. . .	*Miss May Sunderman*
ACKARNES FROM THE DESERT		*Mr. Rockcliffe Fellowes*
FIRST DROMEDARY MAN		*Mr. Edwin F. Thompson*
SECOND DROMEDARY MAN		*Mr. Edgar Stehli*
NENECK OF THE MEADOWS		*Miss Mona Morgan*
THE OTHERS		*Mr. Charles Duff* *Mr. Ackerman* *Mr. C. Black* *Mr. L. Darcy* *Mr. William Carmichael* *Mr. F. Levison* *Mr. James Murphy*

Mr. Brady presented "The Gods of the Mountain" upon the evenings of April 8th, 9th, and 10th, in Buffalo, and in the Shubert Theater, Rochester, New York, upon the 11th, 12th, and 13th, after which the play was withdrawn.

On October 27th, 1916, "The Gods of the Mountain" was produced for a second time in America, by Stuart Walker, in his Portmanteau Theater, then at Mount Holyoke, Massachusetts. The cast, which subsequently played 28 performances during a repertory season in New York, was as follows:

ULF		*Mr. Edgar Stehli*
OOGNO		*Mr. Lew Medbury*
THAHN		*Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer*
AGMAR	*Beggars*	*Mr. Stuart Walker*
SLAG		*Mr. Gregory Kelly*
A THIEF		*Mr. Robert Cook*
MLAN		*Miss Agnes Rogers*
OORANDER		*Mr. Willard Webster*
ILLANAUN	*Citizens*	*Mr. Ward Thornton*
AKMOS		*Mr. McKay Morris*
A MOTHER		*Miss Florence Wollersen*
AN OLD WOMAN WHO SELLS WATER		*Miss Judith Lowry*
A DROMEDARY MAN		*Mr. Edmond Crenshaw*
A WOMAN WHO SINGS		*Miss Dorothea Carothers*
A CHARMER OF SNAKES		*Miss Gitruda Tritjanski*

The scenes, costumes, and properties for this production were designed by Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer. Mr. Walker made use of music especially composed by Mr. Arthur Farwell.

The Golden Doom

Produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on November 19th, 1912. Afterwards made a tour of Russian cities. The cast was as follows:

First Sentry	*Mr. Allan Jeayes*
Second Sentry	*Mr. G. Dickson Kenwin*
Stranger	*Mr. Leonard E. Notcutt*
Girl	*Miss Eileen Esler*
Boy	*Mr. Eric Rae*
Spies	*Mr. Claude Rains* *Mr. Gerald Jerome* *Mr. Cyril Hardinham*
Chamberlain	*Mr. E. Lyal Swete*
The King	*Mr. Henry Hargreaves*
First Prophet	*Mr. Ralph Hutton*
Second Prophet	*Mr. Frank Pridley*
Chief Prophet	*Mr. Ewan Brook*
Attendants	*Mr. M. Brier* *Mr. R. Lewis* *Mr. C. Miles* *Mr. G. Playford*

The first American production was made by Mr. Stuart Walker in his Portmanteau Theater, at Hartford, Connecticut, on October 24th, 1916, with scenery designed by Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer, and with the following cast:

First Sentry	*Mr. Edgar Stehli*
Second Sentry	*Mr. Lew Medbury*
A Stranger	*Mr. Ward Thornton*
Boy	*Miss Agnes Rogers*
Girl	*Miss Nancy Winston*
Spies	*Mr. Gregory Kelly* *Mr. Charles Mason* *Mr. John Higgins*
The King	*Mr. McKay Morris*
The Chamberlain	*Mr. Willard Webster*
First Prophet	*Mr. Robert Cook*
Second Prophet	*Mr. Frank J. Zimmerer*
Chief Prophet	*Mr. Ward Thornton*

During the season of 1916–1917, Mr. Walker played "The Golden Doom" in New York 11 times, as well as in many other American cities.

The Lost Silk Hat

Produced by Mr. B. Iden Payne, at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on August 4th, 1913, with the following cast:

The Caller	*Mr. Basil Ryder*
The Laborer	*Mr. H. F. Maltby*
The Clerk	*Mr. Leonard Chapman*
The Poet	*Mr. Ernest C. Cassel*
The Policeman	*Mr. Tom Kilfoy*

There has been no notable American production.

A Night at an Inn

The first production was at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York City, on May 13th, 1916, with the following cast:

A. E. Scott-Fortesque (*The Toff*)		*Mr. David Solomon*
William Jones (*Bill*)	*Sailors*	*Mr. Max M. Kaplan*
Albert Thomas		*Mr. S. P. Zalmanovic*
Jacob Smith (*Sniggers*)		*Mr. Sol Friedman*
First Priest of Klesh . .		*Mr. Jacob Liss*
Second Priest of Klesh .		*Mr. Ira Uhr*
Third Priest of Klesh .		*Mr. David Goldstein*
Klesh		*Mr. Norman Nacman*

There has been no notable British production.

The Queen's Enemies

First produced at The Neighborhood Playhouse, New York City, on November 14th, 1916, with scenery designed by Mr. Howard Kretz and Mr. Warren Dahler, with costumes designed by and executed under the direction of Miss Aline Bernstein and Miss Ruth Deike, with lighting effects devised by Mr. Dennis Sullivan, and with the following cast:

THARRABAS	*Mr. Albert J. Carroll*
THARNI	*Mr. Erskine Sanford*
HARLEE	*Mr. Arthur Wood*
THE QUEEN	*Miss Alice Lewisohn*
ACKAZARPESES	*Miss Louise Coleman*
PRINCE ZOPHERNES . .	*Mr. Henley Edwards*
PRINCE RHADAMANDASPES	*Mr. Leslie Austen*
PRIEST OF HORUS . . .	*Mr. C. Haviland Chappell*
TWIN DUKES OF ETHIOPIA	*Mr. Wells Spaulding* *Mr. George Abbott*
	Mr. Arnold Rittenberg
	Mr. J. F. Roach
SLAVES	*Mr. William Essex*
	Mr. Arthur Stevens

On the 18th of December the production was transferred to The Maxine Elliott Theater, with the substitution of Miss Cathleen Nesbit for Miss Lewisohn in the part of the Queen; thus leaving the cast entirely composed of professionals. There has been no notable British production.

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

The first production of this play took place at the dedicatory performance of the Arts and Crafts Theater, Detroit. The production was in charge of Sam Hume, who also designed the set, in which he was assisted by Judson Smith. Three performances were given on the 16th, 17th, and 18th of November, 1916. The cast was as follows:

Bel-Narb	*Carl Guske*
Aoob	*Eugene J. Sharkey*
The King	*R. J. Elliott*
The Chamberlain	*Harry B. Elliott*
Zabra	*Edward Loud*
Eznarza	*Louise Vhay*

There has been no British production.

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